

**DOUCHEBAG POLITICS • A FORGOTTEN INJUSTICE**

JUNE 2009

# IN THESE TIMES

*Glimmers of*  
**HOPE?**

**Tic** of the  
new **millennium**

**Letter** from a small  
fry **terrorist**



- Zero nukes
- Bank takeovers
- Healthcare for all
- Real defense cuts
- Free choice for workers

\$3.50 USA \$3.50 CANADA



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# mixed reaction

## JUST THE FACTS



**2,371** Cases of swine flu, aka H1N1, confirmed by the World Health Organization on May 7

**79** Percent of U.S. pigs raised on factory farms—the breeding grounds for influenzas like swine flu

**1998** Year the genetic precursor to H1N1 was found on a North Carolina factory hog farm

**850** Million of dollars for influenza preparedness that Congress removed from the stimulus package after Republicans criticized it as wasteful spending

“

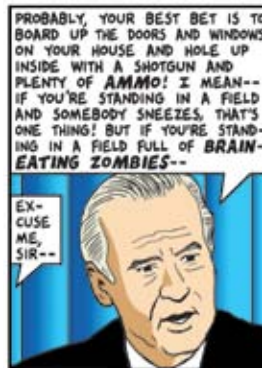
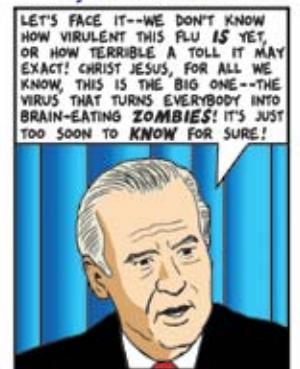
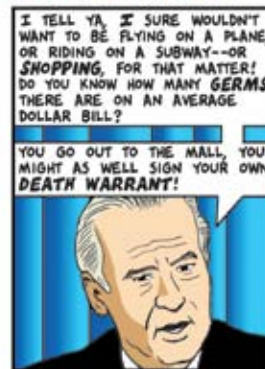
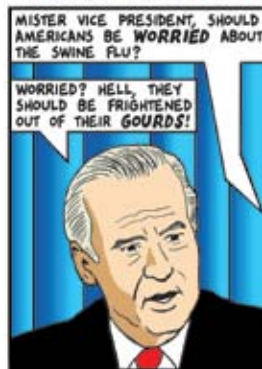
The truth is that nothing is less sensational than pestilence, and by reason of their very duration great misfortunes are monotonous.

”

—ALBERT CAMUS, *THE PLAGUE (LA PESTE)*, 1947

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



## QUID PRO QUO

### THE QUID:

According to transcripts of National Security Agency wiretaps, in 2005 or 2006, an Israeli agent asked Rep. Jean Harman (D-Calif.) to lobby the Bush administration to drop charges against Steven Rosen and Keith Weissman, two employees of American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) who had been charged with spying. She agreed to do so, telling the agent, "This conversation doesn't exist."

### THE QUO:

In return, Blue Dog Harman wanted AIPAC's assistance in getting House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to appoint her chair of the House Intelligence Committee when Democrats recaptured the House in 2006. She didn't get appointed chair, but the "pro-Israel" lobby did give her \$53,150 during the 2005-2006 election cycle, according to OpenSecrets.org, the Web site of the Center for Responsive Politics.



Harman, a vocal proponent of wiretapping, has taken in \$347,688 dollars from the pro-Israel lobby since being elected to the House in 1992.

# contents

VOLUME 33 - NUMBER 06



26



32



18



22

## FEATURES

### 16 TEABAGS VS. DOUCHEBAGS

Why this may not be the new New Deal after all  
BY DAVID SIROTA

### 18 SKEWED DEBATE

Strange bedfellows oppose single-payer healthcare reform  
BY ROGER BYBEE

### 20 DEFENSE BUDGET SHELL GAME

Behind the hoopla, military spending continues to rise  
BY FRIDA BERRIGAN

### 22 BATTLING OVER EMPLOYEE FREE CHOICE

The fate of labor's top legislative priority  
is in the Senate's hands  
BY DAVID MOBERG

### 24 SHILLING ON THE CORPORATE DOLLAR

Business-sponsored 'scholars' deliver  
anti-union talking points  
BY ART LEVINE

### 26 THE ONLY ROAD OUT OF CRISIS

Yes, it is socialism, but nationalize the banks already  
BY JOSEPH M. SCHWARTZ

## VIEWS

### 7 HEALTH & SCIENCE

Letter from a small fry terrorist  
BY TERRY J. ALLEN

### 8 BACK TALK

Antidote to drug war madness  
BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

### 9 VIEWPOINT

Jacob Zuma: Sub-Saharan populist  
BY G. PASCAL ZACHARY

## FRONTLINE

### 10 XE IS THE PROBLEM

Fighting the corporation  
formerly known as Blackwater  
BY JENNY TOMKINS

#### ALSO:

- Reinventing demons
- The aspiration of Global Zero
- Israel's center does not hold

### 14 APPALL-O-METER

BY DAVE MULCAHEY

## CULTURE

### 30 HOME AGAIN?

Vicente Serrano's documentary  
chronicles a forgotten injustice.  
BY LOU MATTEI

#### ALSO:

- Coal Mountain Elementary
- Drama queens

### 34 EXCERPT

Spine of the *Times*

### 36 AT THE END OF THE DAY, IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD

The tic of the new millennium  
BY EMILY BAUMAN

### 28 UNRAVELING AFGHANISTAN

Journalist Jonathan Landay outlines  
our quandary in South Asia  
BY GEORGE KENNEY



## A Specter is Haunting Dems

**S**EN. ARLEN SPECTER (D-Pa.) had every reason to free himself from the wing nuts that bind the rusty Republican Party. His job was imperiled by a far-right primary challenger. It's likely other Republican elected officials, perhaps Maine's Sens. Olympia Snow or Susan Collins, will join the exodus.

But what of the Democratic Party? What does it gain from poaching Specter? The absorption of "moderate" Republicans will only shift the Democratic caucus, and the country's perceived political center, toward the right.

Naturally, the corporate wing of the Democratic Party is overjoyed. Upstart progressive populists, the very people that turned the party's fortunes around in recent election cycles, have been given a very clear message from the bosses: Welcome Specter. "Our goal in 2010 is not to have a primary," Pennsylvania Democratic Party Chairman T.J. Rooney told reporters.

In other words, forget the fact that on his first day as a Democrat, Specter said he would support a filibuster of the Employee Free Choice Act. On his second day, he voted against the Obama budget. On the third day, he voted against the housing bankruptcy reform legislation, which would have given a break to families facing foreclosure. And he continues to oppose a healthcare reform bill that includes a public option.

The new chair of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), Clintonista Bruce Reed crooned in a *Slate.com* article that Specter's defection was "an encouraging omen for Obama's effort to build a new, pragmatic, post-partisan politics."

"Post-partisan politics" is code for a politics that basks in the glow of the status quo—a politics that accommodates itself to the needs of corporate America.

In this context, "ideological politics" becomes code for people who care about such quaint principles as democracy and justice. People like crazed ideologue Chris Bowers.

On June 5, Bowers will be attending the next committee meeting of the Pennsylvania State Democratic Party, of which he is a member. Writing on *OpenLeft.com*, Bowers expressed his hope that he would find other members "who don't want to just vote for Arlen Specter now that he has changed parties, but hasn't changed his positions on apparently anything." "If Specter wants to become the Democratic nominee," Bowers wrote, "then he needs to earn it through a contested primary with an actual Democrat."

For having had the temerity to write that Specter was "the Democrat Most Deserving of a Primary Challenge," Reed slammed Bowers for mounting a Republican-like "campaign to purge non-ideologues."

"The object lesson is clear: Setting out to purge your party of independent thinkers won't make it stronger," Reed wrote. "Democrats should take that lesson to heart."

Bowers had suggested that Specter face a "primary," not a "purge." There is a difference. Primaries are the main mechanism of internal party democracy, by which the parties' rank and file selects candidates for general elections. As former Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean explained to the *Huffington Post*, if Specter doesn't change his positions "of course there is going to be a Democratic primary."

Democratic bigwigs in D.C. and Pennsylvania need to understand that the Democratic Party is not their private preserve. There must be a primary, and Democratic voters must have their say.

—Joel Bleifuss

# IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

FOUNDING EDITOR & PUBLISHER  
James Weinstein (1926–2005)

EDITOR & PUBLISHER Joel Bleifuss

SENIOR EDITORS Terry J. Allen, Patricia Aufderheide, Lakshmi Chaudhry, Adam Doster, Susan J. Douglas, David Moberg, Dave Mulcahey, Salim Muwakkil, David Sirota, Silja J.A. Talvi, Kurt Vonnegut (1922–2007)

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Dean Baker, Frida Berrigan, Will Boisvert, Phyllis Eckhaus, Barbara Ehrenreich, Mischa Gaus, Juan Gonzalez, Paul Hockenos, George Hodak, Doug Ireland, John Ireland, Hans Johnson, Kari Lydersen, Naomi Klein, John Nichols, James North, Jehangir Pocha, Jessica Pupovac, Laura S. Washington, Fred Weir, Adam Werbach, Jacob Wheeler, Slavoj Žižek

IN THESE TIMES BOARD OF EDITORS R.M. Arrieta, Bill Ayers, Lindsay Beane, Frida Berrigan, Martha Biondi, Sharon Bloyd-Peshkin, Ken Brociner, Michelle Chen, Fred Clarkson, Bernardine Dohrn, Melryn Dubofsky, Eve Ewing, James Flammang, John Foley, Greg Foster, Joel Handley, Sidney Hollander, Peter Hoyt, Lynette Jackson, David Dyssgaard Kallick, George Kenney, Alice Kim, Alan Kimmel, Barry Komisaruk, Andrew Lehman, David Moberg, Anne Elizabeth Moore, Juan Mora-Torres, Christopher Moraff, Nancy Fleck Myers, Laura Orlando, Gordon Quinn, Hirashi Patel, Dania Rajendra, Rob Richie, Don Rose, Jenny Tomkins, Cassandra West, John Wilson, Joe Wilson, Eric Wolfe, G. Pascal Zachary, Slavoj Žižek

PROOFREADER Alan Kimmel

EDITORIAL INTERNS Amy Brachmann, Adam Case, Selena Kohel, Emily Vaughan

ART DIRECTOR Rachel Jefferson

ILLUSTRATOR Terry LaBan

WEB EDITOR Jeremy Gantz

WEB INTERNS Louis Mattei, Amalia Oulahan

ASSISTANT PUBLISHERS Jarrett Dapier, Dan Dineen

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR Peter Hoyt

ADVERTISING COORDINATOR - Jeremy Rothschild

VOLUNTEERS Donald Minich, Frank Schneider

PUBLISHING INTERNS Rebecca Chen

IN THESE TIMES PUBLISHING CONSORTIUM

Grant Abert, Theresa Alt, Aris Anagnos, Stuart Anderson, Paula and Hal Baron, Matt Groening, Collier Hands, Lorraine and Victor Honig, Polly Howells and Eric Werthman, Betsy Krieger and David Kandel, Nancy Kricorian and James Schamus, Lisa Lee, Chris Lloyd, Bruce Merrill, Edith Helen Monsees, Dave Rathke, Abby Rockefeller and Lee Halprin, Perry and Gladys Rosenstein, T.M. Scruggs, Lois and Richard Sontag, Lewis and Kitty Steel, Ellen Stone-Belic, Dan Terkel



BOARD OF DIRECTORS Jesse Auerbach, Joel Bleifuss, Ron Dorfman, Marguerite Horberg, Andrew Lehman, Juan Mora-Torres, Nancy Fleck Myers, Ellen Stone-Belic, James Thindwa

# contributors

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We encourage letters to the editor, and reserve the right to edit them for clarity, grammar and length. Send them to: 2040 North Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago, IL 60647. Or submit them electronically at: [www.inthesetimes.com/site/about/contact](http://www.inthesetimes.com/site/about/contact). Please include your full name and address.

## SPECIAL REQUESTS

To inquire about lost or damaged issues, back issues and classroom subscriptions, please contact Jarrett Dapier at [jarrett@inthesetimes.com](mailto:jarrett@inthesetimes.com).

## SUBSCRIPTION QUESTIONS

To renew your subscription or change your address, please call 800-827-0270.

## ADVERTISING

Advertisers who choose *In These Times* reach a highly educated, motivated and civically engaged audience.

To request a media kit, or learn about online and print advertising opportunities, please contact Dan Dineen at [dan@inthesetimes.com](mailto:dan@inthesetimes.com).

*In These Times* (ISSN 0160-5992) is published monthly by the Institute for Public Affairs, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, IL and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *In These Times*, 308 E. Hitt St., Mt. Morris, IL 61054. This issue (Vol. 33, No. 6) went to press on May 8, 2009 for newsstand sales from to June 2, 2009 to June 30, 2009. The entire contents of *In These Times* are copyright © 2009 by the Institute for Public Affairs, and may not be reproduced in any manner, either in whole or in part, without permission of the publisher. Copies of *In These Times'* contract with the National Writers Union are available upon request. Contact the union at (212) 254-0279 or [www.nwu.org](http://www.nwu.org).

Subscriptions are \$36.95 a year (\$59 for institutions; \$61.95 Canada; \$75.95 overseas). For subscription questions, address changes and back issues call (800) 827-0270.

Complete issues and volumes of *In These Times* are available from Bell and Howell, Ann Arbor, MI. *In These Times* is indexed in the Alternative Press Index and the Left Index. Newsstand circulation through Districor Magazine Distribution Services, at (905) 619-6565. Printed in the United States.



**EMILY BAUMAN**, who perks up her ears when she hears “at the end of the day,” teaches writing and cultural studies in the Liberal Studies Program at New York University. She has published on intelligent design and postcolonial theory, and is currently writing a book on angels in contemporary American literature and culture.



**EVE EWING**, a member of the *In These Times* Board of Editors, is a writer and teacher in Chicago. She edited Emily Bauman's back-page story for this issue. Eve's commentary has appeared in print, online and radio venues, including *AREA Chicago* and NPR's *Morning Edition*. She is currently exploring Chicago's spoken word history.



**ROBERT G. GARD JR.**, a retired Lieutenant General of the United States Army, is a senior military fellow at the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation in Washington, D.C. A former president of the National Defense University, he was the steering committee chairman of Vets for Obama in the 2008 General Election.



**JENNY TOMKINS**, a member of the *In These Times* Board of Editors, lives Sycamore, Ill. She has an M.A. in journalism from the University of Wisconsin and currently works as an interim innkeeper. Her abiding passions are politics, her family, and eating, growing and writing about food.

**JEREMY BIGWOOD** is an investigative journalist and photojournalist with a background in science. He has written for the *American Journalism Review*, the *Village Voice* and many other publications. As a photojournalist covering the Central America civil wars from 1984-1994, his images were published worldwide.

**JEAN FORST** has worked as a community organizer around literacy, environmental and labor issues. She just completed her Ph.D. in American literature at University of Illinois.

**KARI LYDERSEN**, an *In These Times* contributing editor, is a Chicago-based journalist writing for publications including the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Reader* and *The Progressive*.

**RALPH SELIGER** writes about Israel and Jewish cultural and political issues. He is the editor of *Israel Horizons*, the quarterly publication of Meretz USA, and blogs at the Meretz USA weblog.



*The work of these writers is supported by the Puffin Foundation First Amendment Fund.*

# letters



## Pigocrats

I was disappointed that in “Let’s Expose the Poster Boys of Greed” (May 2009) Susan Douglas backed away from a class critique of plutocrats and adopted a partisan political critique. Surely Phil Gramm is no different from Tom Daschle. They play both sides of the street (politically) to feather their nests.

Please stay focused on the “plutocrats,” but you need a more modern term. Why not sponsor a contest among your readers: “Name the Greedy Boys.” My entry would be to call them Lipstick Pigs.

*Robert Perrucci  
West Lafayette, Ind.*

## Cast lead, not doubts

Not once does either Naomi Klein or Rabbi Arthur Waskow (“To Boycott Israel ... Or Not,” April 2009) consider why Israel might have felt compelled to re-invade Gaza earlier this year; that Operation Cast Lead was illegal and barbarous is apparently gospel to them. Why is this relevant? Because while mainstream

opinion in the West might occasionally complain about individual acts by the Israel Defense Forces, most observers outside of the Muslim world (including those making policy decisions) fundamentally accept Israel’s narrative of the conflict, namely that Israel is a European democracy with the misfortune of being located in a savage part of the world and that its citizens’ desire for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is not shared by its neighbors.

*Daniel Horowitz  
Toronto, Ontario*

## Perk up your earmarks

With earmarks, it’s incredibly difficult to separate the wasteful earmarks from the useful ones (“‘Reform’ to Nowhere,” by David Sirota, May 2009). Rep. DeFazio’s (D-Ore.) concept of accountability is self-serving—“I spend federal money on local projects, and I keep getting re-elected”—well, imagine that! But what about the rest of us who are paying for DeFazio’s projects?

Sirota assumes that useful projects can only be funded through earmarks.

Baloney. Get rid of the earmarks first. Then, if you have a worthy project that you want the federal government to finance, make a case for it and you just might get your money. If we’d had oversight early in the process, and not after the fact, there never would have been a controversy about ice sleds to begin with.

*marcelloog  
InTheseTimes.com*

## Global tar pit

What happened to create this global tar pit was not capitalism, per se (“The Melt-down Goes Global,” by David Moberg May 2009). It was a bipartisan congressional-big business joint venture that fed the greed of a few at an immense cost of many.

Under the guise of “good things at cheap prices for the consumer” and the “new service economy”—the United States went from making

things better than others, safer than others and healthier than others to flipping burgers, packing groceries and mowing lawns. (What when I was young were considered after school jobs.)

The Bush administration’s Henry Paulson and his cronies have scammed us and Sir Obama, who “we have been waiting for,” has yet to deliver a change I can believe in.

*whatttheheck  
InTheseTimes.com*

## INTHESETIMES.COM



As always, be sure to visit [InTheseTimes.com](http://InTheseTimes.com) for web-only features, interviews and columns.

In mid-May, we’ll excerpt a new book that chronicles a bitter labor conflict *In These Times* covered closely in the mid-1990s. *Staley: The Fight for a New American Labor Movement* details the three-year fight for better working condition by unionists at the A.E. Staley corn processing plant in Decatur, Ill.

And Mike Lynn will review a new book about our energy future. Lynn writes that David Holmgren’s *Future Scenarios: How Communities Can Adapt to Peak Oil and Climate Change* suggests that the fast converging crises of peak oil and climate change may lead to a radically different future of less energy and more locally focused lives.



Also new and only at [InTheseTimes.com](http://InTheseTimes.com): “The Psychologists of Torture,” by Fred Clarkson, examines the role psychologists and other medical professionals played in crafting and executing Bush administration torture policies; Salim Muwakkil examines the irony of President Obama’s boycott of a UN conference on racism; David Moberg spotlights Colombian flower workers struggling for better working conditions; and columnist Ken Brociner challenges Naomi Klein’s views on Israel.





BY TERRY J. ALLEN

# Letter From a Small Fry Terrorist



**Dear Sen. Patrick Leahy,**

*I write from my sleeper cell outside Hardwick, Vt., through a constituent I persuaded to give you this letter.*

*I cannot speak my happiness on reading that you propose immunity for torturers and war criminals who confess, saying they "won't be prosecuted unless they commit perjury."*

*Your plan will bring great shouts of joy from the Absolved: the high officials who authorized torture, the lowly who carried it out and the medical personnel who facilitated it.*

*I, too, have confessions pertaining to acts some partisans might label "crimes against humanity." I assure you that my misdeeds also had high motives in service to God, nation and the protection of my people's way of life. Our sons are being killed, our blood is being shed, our holy places are being attacked.*

*Perhaps they are not as tall as your towers, but they are mighty to us. And we do only what God instructed—protect our lands from invasion and our women from immodesty and corrupting Western influences, like education.*

*Before, I took pride in my power and righteousness. Now I am more wishing to avoid prison or drone attack. So I praise you for championing hearings based on the South African Truth and Reconciliation model, and giving it teeth by warning that if "people at a higher level did something illegal and refused to testify, they don't get immunity."*

*I do NOT refuse, knowing you will grant me absolution if I clean my breast of my just, but perhaps overzealous, deeds. You said immunity should be done "very, very carefully, only after consultation with the Department of Justice." Without a Truth Commission, you note, getting to the bottom of things might take 20 years, "and we'd probably end up with all the small fries."*

*That's me! Small fry terrorist. Unlike the torture masters and lawyers, my crimes are little potatoes. I have yet to destroy many lives. As Donald Rumsfeld said, "Stuff happens."*

*A lawyer and a lawmaker, you once said that "nobody's above the law in this country" and laws apply to all equally. Adding the concept of immunity for confession is a glorious improvement.*

*Despite knowing that U.S. officials sanctioned and carried*

*out torture, for which international law requires prosecution, you have the courageous pragmatism to call for words, not punishment.*

*Thus, your hearings will combine those great tenets of democracy: catharsis and entertainment. All Americans will benefit watching perpetrators squirm—even knowing there will be no consequence beyond book deals and Fox News slots.*

*How gracious the commission will be if Abu Ghraib interrogators go free, despite an autopsy on Manadel al-Jamadi that ruled his death a homicide from "blunt force injuries" and "compromised respiration." Your president is willing to let bygones be bygones for the actual torturers, since they, like me, were only following orders—a phrase he sagely avoided.*

*I will accept the same immunity your plan may grant to*

*those who waterboarded one prisoner 183 times in a month; to psychologist James Mitchell, who laid the intellectual justification for torture, reportedly telling a CIA official that terrorists "would confess for only*

*one reason: sheer terror" (while U.S. officials will confess freely for immunity!); and to officials who approved or advocated torture—George J. Tenet, John McLaughlin, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Dick Cheney (who once rudely advised you do an impossible act upon your esteemed person), George Bush, John Ashcroft, Rumsfeld, and Republican and Democratic congressional leaders Nancy Pelosi, Peter Goss, Bob Graham, and Richard Shelby.*

*Sadly, I cannot legitimize my crimes with great documents from a legal team like Jay Bybee (now a federal judge), John Yoo (now teaching college), William Haynes (now working for Chevron), Alberto Gonzales, David Addington and Douglas Feith. But I have ways to recruit loyal servants who will insist my acts were pure and legal.*

*Agreeing with your president that we should look forward rather than back, I look forward to retiring from terrorism, raising goats, writing my memoirs, meeting Oprah, and (please permit me a small joke) becoming a federal judge.*

*In closing, dear Senator, I join throngs who will sing praises for your efforts to bring closure and expose facts. For eight years, America ceded liberty to security. Now it has the opportunity to further truth by sacrificing justice and the rule of law. What a wonderful precedent for well-meaning criminals like me. ■*

**Unlike the torture masters and lawyers, my crimes are little potatoes. I have yet to destroy many lives. As Donald Rumsfeld said, 'Stuff happens.'**

**CONTACT** Terry J. Allen at [tallen@igc.org](mailto:tallen@igc.org)

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

## Antidote to Drug War Madness



**S**o I WAS making dinner, and on NPR I hear, to my amazement, a report by Robert Siegel and Michele Norris marking April 20 as Marijuana Observance Day. “We’re hearing more talk about legalizing marijuana,” noted Norris, “and not just from those who are lighting up.” I, myself, lit up—metaphorically—over this. Aside from the fact that this is a policy change

that’s at least 30 years overdue, the story aired at the same time we were cringing over the long-suspected yet nonetheless horrific accounts of torture under the Bush regime. Once again, the right wing of the Republican Party comes off as addicted to all forms of cruelty, just as it did when it sanctioned “extreme rendition.” But maybe if right-wing Republicans all smoked a little pot—the gateway drug to mellowness—the world would be a better place. Just a thought.

As many critics and commentators—and not just on the left—have noted, repeatedly, the so-called “War on Drugs” is one of the single most ineffectual, expensive, dangerous, dumb-ass activities our government engages in, especially the part focused on marijuana. Let’s hear that radical socialist William F. Buckley on the subject in 2004, in what he calls an “exercise in scrupulosity”: “There are approximately 700,000 marijuana-related arrests made very year. Most of these—87 percent—involve nothing more than mere possession of small amounts of marijuana . . . Professor Ethan Nadelmann of the Drug Policy Alliance . . . estimates at 100,000 the number of Americans currently behind bars for one or another marijuana offense.” Buckley’s conclusion? Legalize it. Glenn Beck has jumped on the bandwagon. So has Ron Paul, who called the war on drugs “a total disaster.”

President Obama recently received multiple questions at a town hall meeting asking if marijuana shouldn’t be legalized to help the economy, and Attorney General Eric Holder announced that the federal government, unlike under Bush, would no longer raid medical marijuana dispensaries.

In the wake of this, John Burnett and Carl Kasell on NPR imagined a country in which pot had been legalized for two years. They cited Jeffrey Miron, a Harvard economist and expert on the economics of the marijuana market. What might

the economic benefits of legalizing pot be? While not earth-shattering when compared to, say, never having invaded Iraq, from a benefit-cost analysis alone, legalization makes sense. “Miron figures state and federal taxes on cannabis sales adds up to \$6.7 billion annually,” Burnett reported. “And he calculates the savings from not having to enforce state and federal marijuana laws, in arrests, prosecution and incarceration, at \$12.9 billion a year. Excluding additional expenses, such as the public health cost of marijuana, or the cost of administering the new law, Miron figures that legal pot creates almost a \$20 billion bonus.”

This idea seems everywhere in the air this spring. Bruce Mirken, a spokesman for the Marijuana Policy Project, notes that government surveys indicate about 15 million

Americans admit to having smoked pot in the previous month. California Assemblyman Tom Ammiano projected that marijuana is a \$14 billion dollar industry in his state alone, which if taxed, could

**Maybe if right-wing Republicans all smoked a little pot—the gateway drug to mellowness—the world would be a better place.**

bring in \$1.3 billion in revenues. So he introduced a bill to legalize it. D.L. Hughley did a piece on legalization on his CNN show. *The Wall Street Journal* (!) featured an editorial titled “The War on Drugs is a Failure” by three former Latin American presidents who proposed decriminalization of pot for personal use.

Some of the new focus on this issue stems, of course, from the soaring drug-and-gun violence on the Mexican border. It is estimated that in the last year alone, more than 5,000 people in Mexico have died in drug-related violence. Some of the impetus is economic. Some is humanitarian: Since 1970, the government has arrested a staggering 38 million people for nonviolent drug offenses, and the percentage of such offenders in our prison-industrial complex has soared 2,557 percent during this time. Currently, nearly half a million people are in jail on drug charges. There were more arrests for drug violations than for any other offense in 2007. It is the war on drugs that makes the United States the world’s largest jailer.

Of course, it is politically impossible for the first African-American president to legalize pot, isn’t it? And he obviously has other crucial issues to tackle. But if Republicans, many of whom might benefit from passing the bong, followed the lead of Buckley, Beck and Paul, this extravagant waste of human and financial resources could end. ■



BY G. PASCAL ZACHARY

# Jacob Zuma: Sub-Saharan Populist



**T**HE ANXIETY OVER the selection of Jacob Zuma as president of South Africa obscures a significant milestone: For the first time in decades a sub-Saharan nation has at its helm a champion of the ordinary person.

African politics has long been the preserve of aristocrats, soldiers and technocrats. Even with the spread of democratic elections, the region's leaders

tend to come from the ranks of soldiers (Uganda, Rwanda, Zimbabwe), family dynasties (Togo, Kenya, Botswana), or university professors, lawyers and economists (Ghana, Malawi, Liberia). Now South

Africa—the economic and cultural engine of the African continent, home to its most sophisticated universities, media and corporations—has a former goat herder as its president, a rare African leader with the common touch.

Zuma is legendary for his ability to connect with ordinary people. He's secure enough to dance and sing in public. He speaks the language of populism, raising hopes for the vast majority of South Africans who daily endure the misery of poor housing, schools and healthcare.

In contrast to his two predecessors—the saintly Nelson Mandela, who emphasized racial healing, and the aristocratic Thabo Mbeki, who reassured financiers with his strong grasp of macroeconomics—Zuma recognizes that poor people have largely been ignored in post-apartheid South Africa. “We have learnt from the mistakes of the past 15 years, especially the manner in which we may have, to some degree, neglected the people's movement,” he said in April, before his African National Congress swept to victory.

South Africa is the wealthiest African nation but also the nation where wealth is most unequally shared. Now, a bold populist holds ultimate power over government policy in the country. That has important implications for the region, still the world's poorest. Until now, populism has been the missing note in African political culture. Zuma—who spent his youth herding goats and only gained formal education while in prison with Mandela—is refreshingly aware of the inequalities within Africa.

**Will Jacob Zuma emulate the good governance of Lula of Brazil, or will he follow the path of Hugo Chavez, Venezuela's popular autocrat?**

Differences in economic class are especially large in South Africa, hence the prominence of Zuma's populist appeals. Yet his appeals have raised fears. The new president has been called a chameleon, accused of telling his audiences what they want to hear. His turbulent personal life—at least four marriages and his humiliating assertion during a rape trial that he gained immunity from HIV by taking a shower—has invited ridicule. And, doubts persist about his commitment to democracy, with critics arguing he's an old-style African “big man” ready to bully opponents and ravage public coffers with his cronies.

Dismissing complaints, Zuma insists, “There's no cloud around me.” In an Africa bereft of successful populist politicians, Zuma's role models could well come from

Latin America, where income inequality is also extreme and the trade-union movement, as in South Africa, is strong and militant. Under pressure from ordinary people to deliver tangible gains, Zuma

will quickly face a major test: Will he emulate Lula of Brazil, who has struck an admirable balance between good economic governance and re-distribution of wealth to the poor? Or will he follow the path of Hugo Chavez, Venezuela's popular autocrat?

The stakes for Africa are enormous, creating a sense of urgency for Zuma, who is, after all, 67 years old and likely to serve only a single term in office. “We can't waste time,” he says.

Yet at his core, “Zuma is a conservative,” says Moeletsi Mbeki, a South African political economist. He represents yesterday's South Africa and is part of the proud generation that defeated apartheid and then peacefully engineered a transition to durable black-majority rule. Yet Zuma's revolutionary generation still seems uneasy leading South Africa in the now 15-year-old post-apartheid era.

Three in 10 South Africans are younger than 15; they did not live even a day under apartheid. Zuma must find a way to honor his own generation's commitment to racial justice and national liberation, while empowering the masses, who daily suffer the sting of class inequality and yearn for a better life. ■

**G. PASCAL ZACHARY**, a member of the In These Times Board of Editors, is the author of *Married to Africa*, a memoir.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAN KENNEY

On April 27, protesters march to the gate of Xe's U.S. Training Center Midwest in Skunk Hollow, Ill. Police arrested 22 people for trespassing.

## Xe is the Problem

### Keeping the corporation formerly known as Blackwater out of Skunk Hollow

BY JENNY TOMKINS

**A**T FIRST GLANCE, IT appears that 2009 didn't start so well for the military contractor Xe, until February known as Blackwater Worldwide. In January, with multiple other lawsuits pending, six of its former employees went on trial for the death of 17 Iraqi civilians in September 2007 in Nisoor Square, Baghdad. And in March, its contract in Iraq, where it has so far made more than \$1 billion dollars, was canceled.

Yet, on April 20 the AP reported that Xe (pronounced "zee") will remain in Iraq until the summer. It has been widely reported that its aviation company, Presidential Airlines, will continue operations in Iraq until the fall. And Triple Canopy, the com-

pany that will assume Xe's contract in Iraq to protect U.S. personnel, will be hiring former Blackwater/Xe personnel.

The private military corporation (PMC) market, of which Xe is a boutique part, is growing globally at 6 to 8 percent a year and has now surpassed \$100 billion, mostly based in the United States and the United Kingdom. The use of mercenaries goes back millennia, but the phenomenon of corporate private armies capable of challenging the nation state's "monopoly on violence"—as President Barack Obama put it—is a late 20th century development that worries peace activists around the globe. These private armies are used not just on the battlefield but also to protect corporations, train public law enforce-

ment personnel and, as after Katrina, patrol city streets.

Mary Shesgreen, co-founder of the Illinois group, Clearwater, shares President Barack Obama's concern about PMCs. But, unlike the President, she believes they should be made illegal. Shesgreen sees their existence as part of the increasing militarization of our society. "Civilian control of the military is a basic tenet of any democracy. Corporate control, or privatization, is an essentially anti-democratic trend," she says.

As part of its new incarnation, former Blackwater/Xe CEO, Erik Prince, claimed in his resignation speech that the company plans to focus on its "core" business of domestic security training.

A seeming victory for the anti-Blackwater coalition occurred in March 2008, when the company was forced to abandon its plans to develop an 800-acre training facility in rural Potrero, 40 miles east of San Diego. Raymond Lutz, founder of Citizens' Oversight Projects (COPs), which monitors the decision-making process of local government entities, was a key organizer of the opposition.

Lutz believes strongly in working with local elected officials who, he says, "on the whole have the best interests of the community at heart," but he also believes in accountability and uses "net-roots" strategy that includes recording public meetings in order to shine a wider light on the decision making process. COPs successfully recalled the local planning board members who supported the Blackwater site.

Circumstances also were providential: The pent up anger against the war drew demonstrators and garnered press coverage. Environmentalists and local residents who opposed the noise from firing ranges joined forces. Journalist and author Jeremy Scahill chronicled the Potrero victory and insists that its significance should not be underestimated: "Those people ... stood up against one of the most powerful paramilitary groups in this country and won."

Yet while the community of Potrero scored a victory, Blackwater/Xe merely experienced a short-term setback. Hydra-like, it simply popped up in a new guise and a new location. Lutz received a tip less than two months after the Potrero project was abandoned that Xe was seeking permits for a facility in Otay Mesa in the city of San Diego, where it can execute an ongoing training contract with the U.S. Navy and also bid for border security contracts.

In pursuing permits for the Otay Mesa site, Blackwater disguised its application under the names of subsidiaries and broke the project down into several smaller ones to avoid the more intense oversight required for a single large project. The city originally refused Blackwater's certificate of occupancy, but Blackwater took its case to federal court and Bush-appointed Judge Marilyn Huff sided with the company. Opponents want to stop Xe from gaining legitimacy as a state training organization—the company would like to enter into an agreement with the Southwestern Community College District to offer weaponry training to its law enforcement students.

In Illinois, opposition to Xe has been focused on Skunk Hollow in Jo Daviess County in the northwest of the state. In 2006, Blackwater quietly leased an 80-acre weapons training facility there. (Taking over existing training facilities is another favorite Xe tactic to avoid public scrutiny.)

Opposition to what is now known as U.S. Training Center Midwest, began almost immediately, triggered when Dan Kenney, a school teacher from DeKalb, two counties east of Jo Daviess, read about the proposed facility in a short story by the Associated Press.

Kenney was a member of the Confederation of Northern Illinois Peace Groups Coalition, which decided to form Clearwater as part of their focus on war protesters. Over the past three years Kenney has become one of the groups' chief strategists.

He spearheaded the first national conference of PMC opponents, held in the small town of Stockton, close to Xe's U.S. Training Center Midwest, on April 25 to 27. Conference presenters included organizers from North Carolina, California

(by video), Scahill and Col. Ann Wright, the 29-year army veteran who resigned her commission on the eve of the Iraq invasion and is now an outspoken activist against the war and PMCs.

On April 27, 75 conference attendees marched to the gate of the Xe's site to perform a "citizens' foreclosure" on the company. State police arrested 22 protesters

## **Martin Hippe calls the Xe site a 'precancerous mole,' but concedes that most people in Jo Daviess County 'are more concerned about the impact of the mega-dairy.'**

as they rolled under the property gates. The protesters stated that they were "going onto Blackwater's property to serve a notice of foreclosure on the property of a company that is morally bankrupt."

It's been challenging for Clearwater to raise awareness of Xe's presence in Jo Daviess County. The county has other problems, from contaminated drinking water to a proposed new mega-dairy. Martin Hippe, a concerned local resident, calls the Xe site "a precancerous mole" but admits that most people "are more concerned about the impact of the mega-dairy."

Clearwater is also pursuing the passage of state legislation to curtail the use of private military contractors to train police forces. "A company that behaves as if it is above the law, should not be training law enforcement personnel," says Shesgreen. The Illinois State Police opposed a bill by state Rep. Julie Hamos (D) because they did not want to cede the right to get training from the best available trainers, according to Shesgreen. Clearwater's new draft for the 2010 legislative session would limit the state's ability to use private contractors, except in case of emergency. But even this is an uphill fight.

If Clearwater's legislative initiative seems to be temporarily stalled, so too does U.S. Training Center Midwest. When Kenney visited the site in early April—accompanied by 15 Dominican nuns—he says Site Director Eric Davis told him that course enrollment is down and the chances of being certified to of-

fer law enforcement training by the Illinois State Law Enforcement Training Board seem remote. Davis also claimed that Xe's headquarters in Moyock, N.C., is cutting the staff by 50 percent.

At Moyock, Xe is being monitored by Blackwater Watch, an offshoot of Stop Torture Now, an organization formed to oppose extraordinary rendition flights

out of the state. It held the first civil disobedience against a PMC in 2007, simulating the Nisoor Square massacre and has also protested outside the Winston Salem, N.C., offices of Xe's lobbying firm Womble Carlyle Sandridge and Rice. Christian Stallberg who maintains the Blackwater Watch website says, "I think we have raised the awareness considerably."

But he concedes that North Carolina's economy relies on the military. "A lot of people don't draw a distinction between the military and Blackwater," Stallberg says. "It's like a career path: You come out of the military and you've not been trained for anything else so Blackwater takes advantage of that."

Congress is not likely to abolish or limit the power of military contractors. As an alternative, PMC opponents are considering taking the fight to the courts. They argue that use of private contractors in law enforcement violates the Posse Comitatus Act, which forbids the federal government from using the military for law enforcement.

Xe's year may not be going as badly as it appeared at first, but its opponents say that they are in for the long haul too. ■

---

### **GET INVOLVED**

[www.noprivatearmies.net](http://www.noprivatearmies.net) (the Ill. group)  
[www.copswiki.org](http://www.copswiki.org) (the Calif. group)  
[www.blackwaterwatch.net](http://www.blackwaterwatch.net) (N.C. group)  
[www.citizensagainstprivatearmies.org](http://www.citizensagainstprivatearmies.org),  
[www.stopblackwater.net](http://www.stopblackwater.net)



**BYE BYE BYBEE**

The name Jay Bybee didn't ring a bell for most Americans until the release of the now-infamous "torture memos," in which the former high-ranking Justice Department official endorsed and, in a chillingly calm and composed tone, advised government interrogators on the use of "enhanced interrogation techniques" ("torture," to those with a conscience). The missive is deeply disturbing—a *New York Times* editorial called it "a journey into depravity."

President Barack Obama insists he wants to "look forward," but a growing chorus is demanding accountability for the torture authorizers.

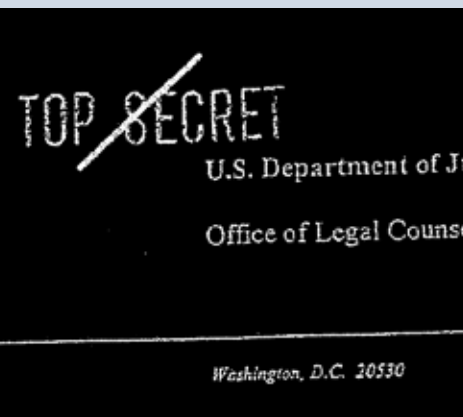
Bybee currently has a cushy job as a federal judge on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. With the morbid memos now public, many say his time is up. The Center for Constitutional Rights and members of Congress, including Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) and Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.) have all called for Bybee's impeachment.

MoveOn.org and AfterDowningStreet.org have joined the call.

"Bybee showed no respect for our laws and isn't fit to be a federal judge," MoveOn's site says. "Congress should impeach him."

To sign a petition to Congress demanding Bybee's removal, visit <http://www.afterdowningstreet.org/bybee> or [www.pol.moveon.org/bybee](http://www.pol.moveon.org/bybee).

—Micah Uetricht

**2005 Summer Seminar Series**

## EXORCISING DEMONS OF THE PAST: SEIZING NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO PROMOTE DEMOCRATIC POLICING

**Session Organizers: Liz Hume, DCHA/CMM and Michael Miklaucic, DCHA/DG**

**JULY 7, 2005**

**"Democratic policing" is back on the PowerPoint agenda.**

## Reinventing Demons

**A**T AN APRIL 7 press conference, President Barack Obama's special advisor for the Summit of Americas Jeffrey Davidow announced the administration's new plan to provide U.S.-funded "public safety" programs to other governments throughout the Western Hemisphere. U.S. public safety programs are necessary now, Davidow said, because "Latin America [and] the Caribbean are witnessing an increase in criminality and are having difficulty confronting this because of judicial and police systems that need assistance, need more training, need more equipment."

The United States has pursued similar policies in the past—with disastrous results. The first such projects were organized in the wake of the Spanish American War, when the United States was keen on policing its newly won satrapies in the Caribbean and Pacific.

Initially, these "security" initiatives were enforced through direct U.S. military occupation. It wasn't until 1954 that a separate "civilian" agency specializing in police aid was established: the Civil Police Administration (CPA), which began operating in Guatemala after the 1954 CIA-backed coup that removed the democratically-elected government of Jacobo Arbenz.

In 1961, President Kennedy formed the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and rolled the CPA into the new agency, renaming it the Office of Public Safety (OPS). Official literature describes OPS's goal as the creation of a "carefully balanced program of technical advice, training and equipment."

In reality, the United States used OPS to control the behavior of foreign police for its own political ends. The goal of U.S. public safety programs was to unify a country's police and military under a central command—overseen by OPS advisors. Assassination, disappearance and torture were the tools of the OPS trade.

Within a few years, officers were operating out of U.S. embassies, police headquarters and safe houses in 15 Latin American countries. Eventually, OPS extended beyond the hemisphere, into Asia and Africa. But wherever the OPS went, brutality followed.

According to a Defense Intelligence Agency report obtained by the National Security Archives, during OPS' operations in Guatemala in the early 1970s, the U.S.-sponsored security forces "quietly eliminated" what the Defense Department called "terrorists and bandits." Under OPS oversight, an estimated 200 people were killed in the San Marcos Department alone, and at least 30 more in the capital city.

Things began to change when reports in the alternative press revealed the op-

pressive and brutal activities of the OPS-backed police forces. In the summer of 1974, with Washington still reeling from allegations about the CIA's malfeasance uncovered by the Church and Pike Committees, Sen. James Abourezk (D-S.D.) introduced an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act that prohibited "police training or related programs in a foreign country." The amendment passed and, for a few years, U.S. "public safety" programs ended.

However, by the 1980s, the Kissinger Commission Report revived the idea, recommending that the United States support foreign police forces, particularly in Latin America. By 1986, the Justice Department had formed the International Criminal Investigations Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), using state department funds to train police in countries like Guatemala.

Congress authorized USAID to get back into foreign policing in 2002, with a "community-based" police assistance mission in Jamaica and in El Salvador in 2003. OPS had operated in both countries, but this time the USAID program could not provide support for lethal weapons and technology or assist intelligence and surveillance operations. Unlike OPS, the new program would provide only money and know-how, not hardware.

These limitations were eroded in 2008 with the passage of the Mérida Initiative. The agreement nearly completed the dismantling of the 1974 prohibition of U.S.-funded policing programs. Under the guise of the war on drugs, the initiative gives \$400 million to the Mexican government and \$65 million to Central American countries, some of which was to be spent on police training. Predictably, reports of human rights violations have surged. In July 2008, a U.S. security firm instructor was even caught on tape training Mexican police in torture techniques.

Obama may not understand the dangerous waters his administration is drifting into by expanding "public safety" policing programs. If the history of the OPS and similar projects are any indication of what will come, U.S. policing initiatives in Latin America and elsewhere could result in violence and political repression.

—Jeremy Bigwood

## The Aspiration of Global Zero

ON APRIL 5, 2009, before a crowd gathered at Hradcany Square in Prague, President Barack Obama declared "America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons." With these words, Obama implicitly endorsed Global Zero—a movement founded in December 2008 by some 100 political leaders from around the world to ban nuclear weapons.

Obama's speech calls to mind the warning of President John F. Kennedy almost half a century ago. Without international agreement on preventive action, he said, there could be 15 to 25 nuclear states in the world by the 1970s, resulting in "the greatest possible danger." President Johnson, heeding Kennedy's alert of a dangerous "tipping point," provided strong U.S. support for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, signed in 1968.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) classifies all signatories as either "nuclear weapons states"—those who tested a nuclear explosive before January 1, 1967—or "non-nuclear weapons states"—everyone else. Coincidentally, all the nuclear weapons states are the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council: the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China and the United States.

At the heart of the NPT is a bargain between these two categories of states. The non-nuclear states agreed not to acquire nuclear weapons. In return, to prevent a permanent disparity in military power, the nuclear states committed "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures" to work toward nuclear disarmament.

Far more non-nuclear states have given up nuclear weapons programs or reversed their intent to develop them than have become nuclear powers, which is the NPT's biggest success. Yet, there are ominous signs that the treaty is unraveling, leading the world to another "tipping point" much like in the 1960s. Israel, India and Pakistan—the only states that didn't ratify the NPT—now possess nuclear arsenals. North Korea withdrew from the treaty and

detonated a nuclear device in 2006, using plutonium made by reprocessing spent reactor fuel. Iran continues to enrich uranium, ostensibly for electric power nuclear reactors. But with minor modifications, the enrichment process can be extended to produce weapons-grade material that can be fashioned into a nuclear device.

All signatories have "the inalienable right" to research, produce and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. They are allowed to enrich uranium and reprocess spent reactor fuel. And with a mere three months notice, any country can withdraw from the treaty if "extraordinary events" have jeopardized its "supreme interests." Between 30 and



On Dec. 11, 2008, Richard Burt, former U.S. chief negotiator in the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks with the Soviet Union, speaks during the launch of the Global Zero initiative in Washington, D.C.

40 states have the capacity to "breakout" this way and develop nuclear weapons, warns Mohammed El Baradei, director of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Unless present trends reverse, he says, there could soon be more than 25 states with nuclear weapons—many unstable and prone to take-over by extremists.

In Prague, Obama committed to a set of concrete steps to strengthen the non-proliferation regime. He pledged to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy and negotiate with Russia to create a legally binding follow-on to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which expires this Decem-

ber. Obama said that terrorists buying, stealing or building nuclear weapons pose the most immediate and extreme threat to global security, and advocated protecting not just the weapons themselves, but tons of fissile materials spread around the world at sites with inadequate security. As little as 50 pounds of highly enriched uranium is enough to fashion a nuclear device that could easily be smuggled into the United States and detonated.

It wasn't until 2004 that the United States announced the adoption of the Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI) whose mission is to "reduce and protect vulnerable nuclear and radiological materials located at civilian sites worldwide." But at the current rate it will take decades to convert or secure pilferable nuclear materials, says former Sen. Sam Nunn, currently the co-chairman and chief executive officer of the Nuclear Threat Initiative. Obama vowed to coordinate with other nations to safeguard nuclear materials in four years.

Obama also proposed two other initiatives in Prague to combat the "breakout" problem. First, a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty would prohibit the production of materials that can be made into nuclear weapons. Second, a reactor fuel bank under international control—coupled with an enforceable Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty—would minimize the likelihood of more states becoming nuclear powers. Obama also advocated strengthening the NPT, including establishing more intrusive inspections by the IAEA and heavy penalties for irresponsible withdrawal.

But implementing these new restrictions requires cooperation among the nuclear weapons states and the non-nuclear weapons states—a difficult prospect as non-nuclear states get increasingly fed up with the failure of nuclear states to actually "negotiate in good faith" toward nuclear disarmament. Obama's declaration to seek Global Zero is important for restoring this faith. Nor

is his commitment irresponsible. He has pledged that the United States will maintain a credible nuclear deterrent as long as other states possess nuclear weapons.

Global Zero is like a mountain covered at the top by a cloud, Nunn says. The analogy is apt. You don't know if you can make it *all* the way up, but it's important to start the climb.

—Robert G. Gard

## Israel's Center Does Not Hold

**W**ITH ISRAEL'S left splintered and shattered, Tzipi Livni's centrist Kadima is now the main opposition to the hard right.

In Israel's national election in February 2009, Livni garnered more votes and parliamentary seats than Benjamin Netanyahu, her main opponent and head of a resurgent Likud party. However, as

# appall-o-meter

## 4.1 'The Golden Girls' Meets 'The Wire'

Sisters Elizabeth Marie Grube, 70, and Elaine Volkert, 65, of Stroudsburg, Pa., would fit in at a church bingo night, but according to the Monroe County District Attorney, the ladies have dealt about \$10,000 of heroin apiece out of their trailer homes near the Poconos. According to the *Allentown Morning Call*, when cops busted the gals in their trailers, they turned up some 1,400 bags of skag. That's more than you can fit in a knitting basket.

Julio Cesar Checo, 28, their alleged supplier—whom the ladies affectionately called "Little Tony"—was also arrested when he dropped by to pick up \$27,000 for an earlier shipment.

## 3.7 Pity The Fools

How could the Cook County Criminal Court in Chicago call up Mr. T and then decline to empanel him?

According to the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Laurence Tureaud, known for playing the gruff but lovable B.A. Baracus on "The A-Team," was called up in a jury pool for the trial of a public housing resident accused

of stashing drugs in her apartment. Mr. T, who grew up in a tough Chicago housing project, would no doubt have made a wonderful foreman for the jury.

"If you're innocent, I'm your best man," he commented as he left the building after being dismissed. "But if you're guilty, I pity that fool."

## 4.6 This Relationship Won't End Well

Seattle police are holding a man on \$1 million bail for a series of events that transpired after he placed an add on Craigslist advertising "a strange desire."

"I have a very strange thing I want to do," he wrote, according to the *Seattle Times*. He wanted to have sex with a consenting woman ... and then kill her. Serious inquiries only, he asked.

A detective contacted the man and asked him if he'd be interested in a contract killing. The man agreed, a time and place was arranged, and in short order he



was arrested, a knife and other weapons in tow.

"He actually has a lot, lot, lot of mental issues that need to be dealt with," the accused's girlfriend and mother of his child told the *Times*. "But he's not really the person they're making him out to be ... He's a good person, an amazing father, and I love him and support him."

## 4.9 Making The Ultimate Sacrifice For Beauty

Motorcycles are called "donorcycles" (as in, organ donor) for a reason. But sometimes even when a cyclist does everything right, things go wrong. Take Anita Zaffke, 56, of Lake Zurich, Ill., who, while waiting at a stoplight, was hit from behind and sent skittering for 200 feet. Despite wearing a helmet, she was killed. According to the *Sun-Times*, the motorist who struck her was painting her fingernails at the moment of impact.

—Dave Mulcahey



is always true in Israeli elections, since no single party won a majority of seats in the Knesset, the candidates had to bargain with leaders of other parties to assemble a ruling coalition. Netanyahu, the second place finisher with 27 votes to Livni's 28, took office as prime minister because he was better able to cobble together a narrow majority coalition from among the 12 party lists elected to parliament.

Netanyahu's coalition includes three other right-wing parties and Labor, which dropped from 19 to 13 seats, falling from second place to fourth, behind Yisrael Beiteinu ("Israel Our Home"), a surging party of the populist right led by Avigdor Lieberman, an immigrant from the former Soviet Union and a one-time aide to Netanyahu.

Both Labor and Lieberman's party have chosen to join Netanyahu's governing coalition, with Labor's Ehud Barak resuming his job as defense minister and the notoriously undiplomatic Lieberman being appointed foreign minister. Barak is widely regarded as a competent minister of defense. Lieberman, known for such ill-tempered outbursts as telling Israel's main Arab friend, Egypt's President Mubarek, to "go to Hell," seems problematic as foreign minister. (Under police investigation for money laundering and other possible charges, Lieberman may not last long.)

Yisrael Beiteinu won 15 seats running an overtly anti-Arab campaign, reacting to pro-Hamas slogans of Israeli Arabs protesting the Gaza war. Lieberman advocates compulsory loyalty oaths and alternative national service for Arab citizens of Israel (other than the Druze, Arab Israelis are exempt from military conscription) and threatens them with a loss of citizenship for refusing to comply, though this is not part of his coalition agreement with Netanyahu.

Lieberman's rabble-rousing theatrics fit the mood of much of Israel's electorate, which has largely lost confidence in a negotiated peace with the Palestinians. Israelis overwhelmingly supported the recent military action against Hamas, but many were puzzled and disappointed that the army had not contin-

## snapshot



**PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN—On May 4, a young boy looks on as he walks through the Kacha Garhi IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) Camp. UNICEF and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees have been working to assist thousands of people displaced by fighting between the Taliban and the Pakistan Army. (Photo by Daniel Berehulak/Getty Images)**

ued its offensive until rocket and mortar fire on southern Israel were completely stopped.

Theoretically, Lieberman is to the "left" of Netanyahu in having endorsed the concept of a Palestinian state, even declaring a willingness to leave his home in a West Bank settlement as part of a trade of territories to implement a peace agreement. In a typically hard-edged twist, however, Lieberman proposes that a heavily Arab part of Israel near the West Bank be transferred to the Palestinian state in exchange for Israel annexing the most populated settlement blocs contiguous to Israel proper. Now, as foreign minister, he's renounced negotiations stemming from the November 2007 agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in Annapolis.

In the meantime, Netanyahu, in his coalition deal with Labor, recognizes all existing agreements with the Palestinians,

contradicting his party's platform, which explicitly opposes a Palestinian state. But Netanyahu is known for contradictions and double-dealing. (In this case, it may be a good thing.)

Israel—as with so much of the world—awaits Obama's intervention to somehow realize a peaceful two-state solution. Promising frameworks or models include the "Clinton Parameters" of late 2000, the unofficial Geneva Accord of December 2003, and the Saudi/Arab League peace plan still on the table from 2002. Concretely, Israel's unilateral expansion of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem needs to stop, and Hamas needs either to be co-opted into, or isolated from, a renewed initiative for peace. It's an open question as to whether the Obama administration has the skill and the fortitude to make these things happen.

**—Ralph Seliger**

# Teabags vs. Douchebags

Why this may not be the second coming of the New Deal after all

BY DAVID SIROTA

**W**HEN *TIME* EDITORS FUSED Barack Obama's head on the famous parade photo of Franklin Delano Roosevelt for a November 2008 cover, comparisons between 1932 and the present day were already a shopworn cliché.

If you were a working journalist in Washington worth your weight in banality, you had made at least 10 giddy references to "nothing to fear but fear itself" and the prospects for a "new New Deal."

The FDR-Obama comparisons seemed so appropriate—here was another Democrat elected during an economic emergency created by decades of conservative mismanagement. But to make such a direct comparison in 2008 meant you didn't know your ass from your teabag, or, more precisely, the difference between a teabag and a douchebag, and how that difference explains why all the New Deal nostalgia may prove foolish.

Teabaggery takes its name from the Boston Tea Party of 1773. Mythologized high-school history texts tell us that colonists tossed British tea into Boston Harbor in America's first populist revolt. Today, as evidenced by the April 15 protests, the original Boston Tea Party has become a transcendent icon of pugilistic radicalism—a symbol of patriotic resistance against unresponsive government and elite douchebags.

Which brings us to douchebaggery, defined by the Urban Dictionary as a philosophy "holding that no one other than [one-self] matters in the least bit, and thus that others can and should be treated like excrement for little or no reason." In Washington, douchebaggery has become

synonymous with milquetoast political platforms, soulless candidates and anti-populist Establishmentarian politics. To wit, Comedy Central's *South Park* substituted an oversized douchebag (named "Giant Douche") for John Kerry in an episode about the 2004 presidential campaign.

The birthing of the most famous political periods and the success of their transformative agendas almost always hinge on struggles between Radical Teabaggers and Establishment Douchebags. And typically, the teabaggers of a prior era have defined the next epoch's politics.

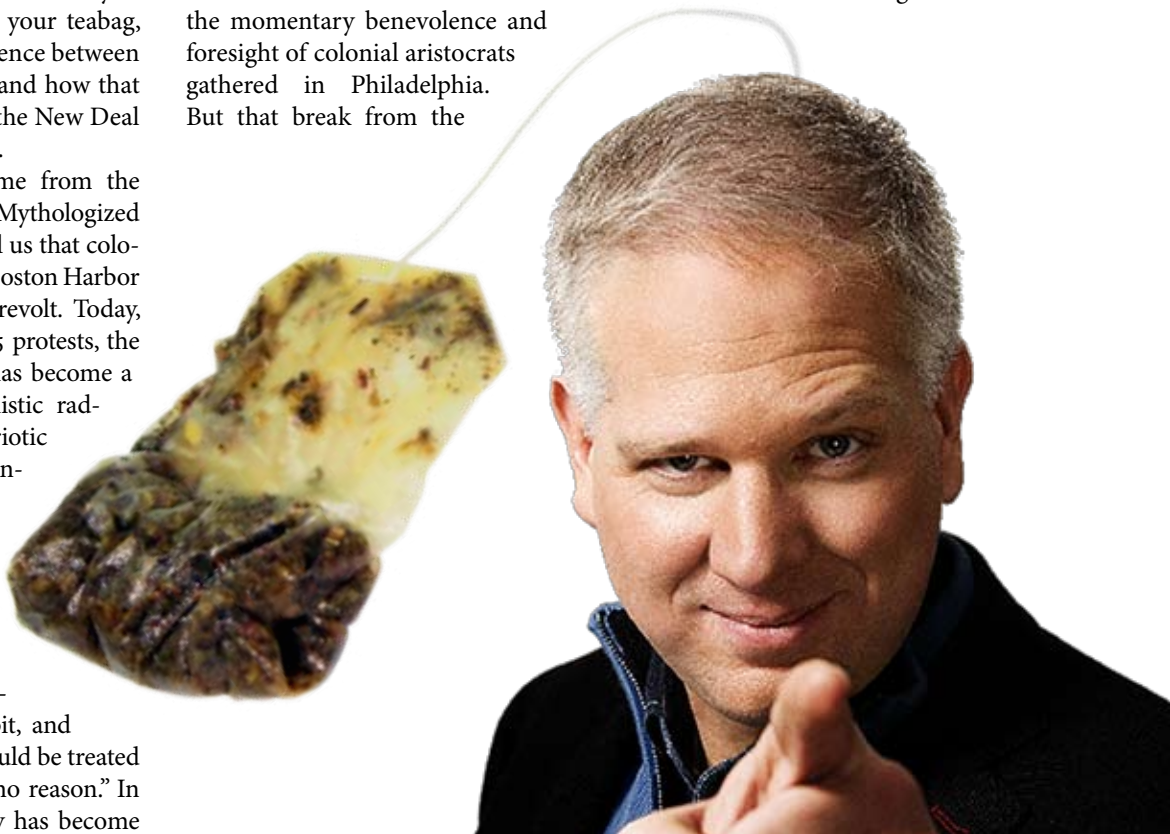
## The Manichean history of teabags and douches

It's easy to think that the revolutionary birth of America materialized from the momentary benevolence and foresight of colonial aristocrats gathered in Philadelphia. But that break from the

monarchy of King George III, and the populist Jeffersonian and Jacksonian eras that succeeded it, came from the first of the Manichean struggles between Teabags and Douches that mark American history.

Through pamphleteers like Thomas Paine and rabble-rousers like Samuel Adams, the radical colonial teabaggers who fought the British douches during the Revolutionary War sowed the political terrain for independence, adoption of the Bill of Rights, and then for the (relatively) radical pre-Civil War eras.

Likewise, decades of activism by abolitionists (teabaggers) forced the president to take on the South's agricultural oligarchy (douchebags) and begin the process of ending the institution of



slavery. Teabaggers like William Jennings Bryan, rural populist parties and labor activists railing against “crosses of gold” set the stage for Theodore Roosevelt to break from fellow Republicans and begin trust-busting the corporate douchebags of the early 20th century. And those same teabaggers helped set the stage for Franklin Roosevelt’s transformative douchebag rout in the 1930s.

Though the 30-year period between the two Roosevelt’s presidencies is portrayed as a halcyon era of country club Republican douchebaggery, the decades were also marked by teabaggers organizing on the left. Reactionary forces like the Ku Klux Klan and the right-wing nativists made their presence felt, but the zeitgeist of the period was embodied in militant labor activism, socialist and communist agitation for a bigger welfare state, Bonus Army revolts for veterans benefits, and feminist activism for suffrage and equality.

Thus, when the Great Depression hit, a political infrastructure and ideological ferment had already created the conditions that would channel the cataclysm’s angst through the prism of a progressive economic program. Progressives had laid the groundwork during the 1920s for the kind of political dynamic that moved the debate leftward and led to New Deal.

### **Hiding douchebaggery inside a teabag**

Progressives remained the dominant rabble-rousing teabaggers from the Great Depression until the 1970s, winning battles not only for the New Deal, but for civil rights legislation and the end of the Vietnam War. Slowly, however, through icons like William F. Buckley, Barry Goldwater and ultimately Ronald Reagan, conservatives figured out how to package their Establishment agenda of tax cuts, deregulation and privatization in the argot of outsider populism. By claiming “extremism is no vice,” railing on “welfare queens,” and insisting “government is the problem,” the Right discovered how to wrap corporate douchbaggery in a teabag.

With the help of conservative think tanks, columnists, television pundits and talk radio hosts, this sleight-of-bag created the politics of perpetual outrage predicated

on the contradictions detailed by Thomas Frank in *What’s the Matter With Kansas?*: impoverished rural states electing Senators on promises to cut inheritance taxes on millionaires and blue-collar workers supporting lawmakers who back job-killing trade deals—as Frank puts it, a country “nailing itself to that cross of gold.”

Today, Republican congressmen cham-

## **With stagecraft defining so much of contemporary politics—and with such a powerful media machine behind the image of conservative teabaggery—the truth doesn’t really matter.**

pion a flat tax and embrace anti-immigrant xenophobia, media voices like Glenn Beck infuse their rhetoric with violent themes, and Texas Gov. Rick Perry (R) endorses the concept of secession—all while a so-called “tea party” movement against government is manufactured via Fox News and a team of lobbyists from FreedomWorks, a corporate front group in D.C.

This might be unimportant during times of relative prosperity. But if, as many economists predict, the current financial crisis becomes the second Great Depression, the period between 1980 and today will have been a crucial pre-depression era—the era whose teabaggers, like those of the pre-depression 1900-1932 period, could drive the policies that emerge from the crisis.

### **The road to Douchedom could be paved with teabags**

In terms of tactics, yesterday’s pre-New Deal labor organizers, Bonus Army marchers and communist agitators have become the militias, tax deniers, Ron Paul-followers and Minutemen who populate the right. And these new voices are being amplified by a powerful Fox News/talk radio noise machine that no teabagger ever had before.

The first 100 days of the Obama administration, the main target of the teabaggers ire has been punctuated by persistent establishment douchebaggery. Specifically, the new White House has supported another bank bailout, considered an attempt to undermine autowork-

ers’ unions, resisted implementing tough Roosevelt-esque financial regulations, and competed with Republicans to see who can float the biggest tax breaks.

Certainly, President Obama’s budget includes some progressive priorities, but the framing and overall direction of the policy debate reflects the pull of right-wing populism. The administration is

still trying to out-tax-cut the GOP, still citing defense budget increases as proof of “toughness,” and still laughing off criminal justice reform proposals for fear of losing “tough on crime” battles.

In the lead up to and aftermath of the April 15 tea parties, progressives used their limited media resources (MSNBC programs, Air America shows, blogs, newspaper columns, etc.) to make fun of the conservative protestors. Many voices lamented that in railing on government and demanding more tax cuts, conservatives continue to champion the Establishment’s wish list—not genuine teabag populism.

On its merits that is true. The April tea parties were organized by corporate lobbyists and backed by the same moneyed Republican douchebags that drove the economy into the ground. But with stagecraft defining so much of contemporary politics, and with such a powerful media machine behind the image of conservative teabaggery, the truth doesn’t really matter.

That means until progressives stop spending their time ridiculing teabaggery and start co-opting it through their own brand of full-throated populism, we will continue to be portrayed as the inept douchebags in the Manichean struggle—and we may see any “new New Deal” opportunity pass us by. ■

---

### **GET INVOLVED**

**A New Way Forward is organizing around the demands of “Nationalize, Reorganize and Decentralize”**

[www.anewwayforward.org](http://www.anewwayforward.org)



# Skewed Debate

## Strange bedfellows oppose single-payer healthcare reform

BY ROGER BYBEE

**P**RESIDENT OBAMA COMMITTED TO making a major legislative push for healthcare reform in his first year in office.

But there is reason to worry that any potential reform may look more like the recent bank bailouts—that is, a massive giveaway to politically connected corporations—than a progressive restructuring of the U.S. healthcare system.

By substantial majorities, both voters and doctors in the United States favor a Canadian-style, single-payer healthcare plan that would dethrone private insurance companies from their commanding role in the current system.

But despite this fact, most healthcare reform lobbying and rhetoric has excluded the single-payer option from the debate, leaving for-profit insurance companies at the heart of the U.S. healthcare system.

### Guaranteed profits?

Rather than pursue a single-payer system, the Obama administration, the insurance industry, unions and citizen groups have settled upon the “guaranteed affordable choice” model, which would mandate that all Americans purchase health insurance or enroll in some version of a public plan. The mandate would be coupled with an agreement by insurers to stop rejecting applicants because of “pre-existing conditions.”

But many health experts argue that insurers have shown enormous ingenuity in avoiding patients who are older or have conditions that will be expensive to treat. Companies manipulate sign-up procedures, avoid marketing in settings where older people are likely to be and delay authorization or payment for treatments, Harvard Medical School’s Dr. David Him-



On March 5, President Barack Obama speaks during the opening session of the White House's forum on healthcare reform in the White House.

CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

melstein told *In These Times*.

If enacted, this “affordable choice” system would likely be an enormous wind-fall for the health insurance industry by adding tens of millions of new enrollees.

“The one model [single-payer] that works is being set aside right from the start as ‘not politically feasible,’” says Chris Townsend, political director of the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers. “But somehow a Rube Goldberg scheme, requiring mandatory purchase of insurance, gets certified as politically viable.”

Still, the labor-consumer coalition Health Care for America Now (HCAN)—composed of roughly 30 groups, including the AFL-CIO, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), USAction, MoveOn.org and La Raza—has aggressively attacked the single-payer approach, citing focus groups and dubious polling.

In his book, *Obama’s Challenge*, progressive economist Robert Kuttner criticizes the promotion of “guaranteed affordable choice,” noting that HCAN’s pollsters “put a subtle thumb on the scale in the way they worded the descriptions of the various approaches that were read to the focus groups.”

Senate Finance Chair Max Baucus (D-Mont.), one of the most powerful members of Congress, already ruled the single-payer option “off the table.” The reason, he explains: “We are Americans. We’re different from Canada, we’re different from the United Kingdom.”

For Baucus, the vital difference is not that U.S. citizens pay double what Canadians and citizens of other advanced nations pay in return for a healthcare system ranked 37th by the World Health Organization. Instead it is Americans’ supposed preference for a system direct-

ed by for-profit insurers. Never mind that more than 40 million Americans already experience a single-payer system via Medicare, which permits a free choice of doctors and uses government leverage to hold down costs.

In *Obama's Challenge*, Kuttner argues that reform stopping short of a single-payer system will lead to both worsening U.S. healthcare coverage and rising costs. "The assumption that a single, comprehensive system is politically out of the question puts America on a path that would combine nominal universal coverage with deterioration in what is actually covered, plus acceleration of cost-shifting to individuals," he writes.

### Unanswered questions

But arguments like Kuttner's have yet to penetrate the armor of the juggernaut lobbying for the "affordable choice" model.

The for-profit players bring to the table an overwhelming array of political resources—campaign contributions, lobbyists, and the ability finance "astro-turf" campaigns that mimic the style of authentic grassroots efforts while being carefully shaped by corporate interests.

Some unions, most notably SEIU, argue that working with insurers and industry groups is a political necessity given the enormous power of the insurance industry. Speaking to *In These Times*, an SEIU spokeswoman proudly enumerated the high-profile members of a broad "affordable choice" alliance to promote a modest form of healthcare reform that was built through several SEIU-affiliated coalitions: Wal-Mart, AT&T, Intel, Manpower, the American Medical Association, the American Hospital Association, America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers and the

conservative Business Roundtable.

Even within these companies and groups, however, thorny issues remain unresolved—especially the nature of the public option. Influential reform voices argue strenuously that the public plan should be a Medicare-style system that can serve as benchmark competition, keeping doctor and hospital prices in check.

## The for-profit players bring to the table an array of political resources—campaign contributions, lobbyists and the ability to finance 'astro-turf' campaigns that mimic grassroots efforts.

Members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, who generally favor a single-payer system, met with President Obama in late April to stress that the public option must be modeled upon Medicare. Caucus members are adamant that the public option serve as an attractive, nonprofit alternative to private insurance and that reform legislation must give states the option of enacting their own single-payer plans.

But medical industry interests and congressional Republicans appear intent on drawing a line in the sand. They argue that a Medicare-based plan would constitute unfair competition. Karen Ignagni, executive director of AHIP, insists: "There's no way to run a side-by-side competition within the current structure."

Similarly, Billy Tauzin, political director of Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, has said that a government-run option would be a slippery slope. "The government becomes a price fixer, and it will drive out private offerings," Tauzin told Politico.com in March 2008. "It ends up being a single-

payer system eventually."

Single-payer advocates view these statements as an admission that a single-payer plan would be much more streamlined and cost-efficient. "It's funny for them to admit the public plan is unfair because it's more efficient," says Dr. Don McCanne, of Physicians for a National Health Plan (PNHP).

Private health companies, McCanne believes, would like a system in which they can insure the young and healthy while pushing expensive care into the government plan. "That way, they can continue to collect premiums and [not] provide service," he says.

United Electrical's Chris Townsend believes that the future of healthcare reform comes down to Obama's political will. Townsend asks: "Is Obama willing to have a political collision with the private interests that have driven the nation into the ditch on one issue after another?"

The answer to that question should be much clearer later this year. ■

**ROGER BYBEE** is a Milwaukee-based freelance writer and progressive publicity consultant whose work has appeared in numerous national publications and Web sites.

### GET INVOLVED

**Physicians for a National Health Plan**  
[www.pnhp.org](http://www.pnhp.org) 312-782-6006

**Health Care for America Now**  
[www.hcan.org](http://www.hcan.org) 202-454-6200

**California Nurses Association/ National Nurses Organizing Org**  
[www.calnurses.org](http://www.calnurses.org) 510/273-2200

**Health Care Now!**  
[www.healthcare-now.org](http://www.healthcare-now.org) 1/800-453-1305

**Progressive Democrats of America**  
[www.pdamerica.org](http://www.pdamerica.org) 877-239-2093

**Leadership Conference for Guaranteed Health Care (aka National Single Payer Alliance)**  
[www.guaranteedhealthcare4all.org](http://www.guaranteedhealthcare4all.org)

**YOUR IDEALS CAN LIVE ON.  
REMEMBER IN THESE TIMES IN YOUR WILL.**

For more information call Joel Bleifuss at 773-772-0100 x232 or e-mail Joel at: [joel@inthesetimes.com](mailto:joel@inthesetimes.com).

# Defense Budget Shell Game

Behind the hoopla, military spending continues to rise

BY FRIDA BERRIGAN

**O**N APRIL 15, LARGE, angry and somewhat wacky crowds of Republican-backed and Fox News-supported “tea party” protesters joined the usual groups of more sedate and earnest peace activists to demonstrate against President Barack Obama’s proposed 2010 budget

Whether they were mad about deficit spending and high taxes or military spending, Obama’s budget of \$3.55 trillion is a lot of money.

Much of those trillions are oriented toward trying to fix the problems of almost a decade of corporations-can-do-no-wrong profligacy. There is a lot to applaud in the budget, like increased spending on health-care, education and developing sustainable energy. But there are still huge military outlays. Obama’s first Department of Defense budget requests \$534 billion in

spending, continuing a decade-long trend of uninterrupted increases. (Indeed, under Bush, the Pentagon’s baseline budget rose by 82 percent between FY 2002 and FY 2009, adjusted for inflation.) On April 6, Defense Secretary Robert Gates announced the detailed budget with a small bit of fanfare, declaring that his budget is intended to “reshape the priorities of America’s defense establishment,” and that his recommendations will “profoundly reform how this department does business.”

## Devil’s in the details

Despite those buzzy action words, Gates’ announcement was pretty cut and dry—a white-haired man reading from a sheaf of paper and responding to questions. For the most part, the cuts he proposed were not dramatic in that they were “budget neutral.” Savings from deciding not to order any more F-22 Rap-

tors goes towards production of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. There is (maybe) one fewer DDG-1000 Zumwalt destroyer, but no change in funding for the Virginia Class attack submarine.

There were some actual cuts to big ticket items. Star Wars missile defense programs were cut by \$1.4 billion, retaining more than \$9 billion a year in spending on what is left of Reagan’s fantastic promise to render nuclear weapons “impotent and obsolete.” The Army’s Future Combat System (FCS)—the troubled system of systems designed to link together armed soldiers, robotic sensors and combat vehicles with a sophisticated communications network—will be cut by \$770 million, as Gates axes the vehicle component. Voicing his frustration about cost over-runs and setbacks, Gates did raise the specter of canning the whole \$87 billion program if significant restructuring was not successful.

Looking carefully at the Pentagon budget, Miriam Pemberton, a military budget expert with the Institute for Policy Studies, estimates that the proposals shave between \$8.6 and \$10.3 billion from weapons procurement funds. If those cuts can be sustained, and if whole programs like FCS are canceled, the savings could total \$98 billion eventually. That would actually edge us towards the sweeping rhetoric that accompanied the announcement.

## Congress up in arms

But between here and there is a hornet’s nest of Congressional parochialism, with Democrats and Republicans lining up behind their friendly neighborhood military contractor and predicting fundamental compromises to our national security as a result of these cuts. Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.), called Gates’ budget the “disarming



On April 6, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates (L) and Marine Corps Gen. James Cartwright, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, hold a cut-and-dry news conference at the Pentagon.

CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES



of America.” The axed vehicle in the FCS was supposed to be partially built in Oklahoma. Inhofe received \$121,700 in defense industry campaign contributions in the 2007-2008 election cycle.

Sen. Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.) accuses Gates of being “willing to sacrifice the lives of American military men and women for the sake of domestic programs favored by President Obama.” Parts for the F-22 Raptor are built in Georgia. Chambliss received \$140,300 in campaign contributions from the defense industry in the 2008 cycle.

Six senators sent Secretary Gates a letter protesting the proposed missile defense cuts and predicting they “could undermine our emerging missile defense capabilities to protect the United States against a growing threat.” Together, the senators received more than \$855,000 from the defense industry in the 2008 cycle.

All of these protesting members of Congress cite the jobs supported by weapons programs. But according to the University of Massachusetts’ Political Economy Research Institute, an investment of \$1 billion in defense creates 8,555 jobs and \$564.5 million wages and benefits. That same amount, invested in education, creates 17,687 jobs and \$1.3 billion in wages and benefits. A Lockheed Martin machinist can’t become a social studies teacher overnight, but transitioning people from military production to more useful sectors of the economy is not rocket science, and the benefits are lasting.

### **GWOT becomes ‘Overseas Contingency Operations’**

Not only is this budget larger than the Bush administration’s last budget; it is just part of the picture. It does not include the full costs of ongoing wars. At the end of March the *Washington Post* reported that the Defense Department’s office of security review sent a memo to Pentagon employees saying, “this administration prefers to avoid using the term ‘Long War’ or ‘Global War on Terror’ [GWOT.] Please use ‘Overseas Contingency Operation.’” Members of the Obama administration quickly fell in line, with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director

Peter Orszag winning the prize for using it most often. But whatever one calls it, it is expensive.

As of October last year, total costs for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan totaled \$864 billion. Now it is President Obama’s turn to add to that number. In Obama’s first and—he insists in the OMB release—last “planned war supplemental” before these

## **A Lockheed Martin machinist can’t become a social studies teacher overnight, but transitioning people from military production to more useful sectors of the economy is not rocket science.**

“costs are accounted for in the budget” the White House is requesting \$83.4 billion for ongoing military, diplomatic and intelligence operations. Of this, \$75.5 billion is for costs related to military operations and intelligence activities in Iraq and Afghanistan. Added into this mix are funds for four more F-22 Raptors (which extends the life of the weapons program that Secretary Gates just axed to save money). The rest—\$7.1 billion—is allocated for international affairs and stabilization activities in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the globe, including economic assistance to Georgia, counter-narcotics programs in Mexico, security assistance in Lebanon and many other budget lines.

Once passed, Obama’s war supplemental will bring the total cost of “overseas contingency operations” since President Bush’s October 7, 2001, invasion of Afghanistan to \$947 billion.

While it is a positive move to bring war funding into the budget routine, this does not mean the United States will stop spending billions a month any time soon. Military operations in Afghanistan—where Obama is surging U.S. forces—have so far cost more than \$170 billion, an average of more than \$20 billion per year. Spending will rise significantly as the United States sends more troops and attends more to the training of Afghan security forces. Military and economic aid to Pakistan is slated to sharply increase and additional civilian development aid to Afghanistan will be a crucial part of the mix

as well. These will be long-term efforts, not the work of a year, or two years, or even five years.

Then there is Iraq, where Obama has pledged to responsibly end the war. But, contrary to popular belief, savings generated by reductions in U.S. forces in Iraq are unlikely to be significant, at least for the next few years. The planned reduc-

tions are fairly gradual. Even after the end of 2011 we may leave a residual force of 50,000 or more military personnel, along with an expanded contingent to train and equip the Iraqi armed forces.

In short, under Obama, Pentagon spending continues to be out of control.

Taxpayers yet unborn, generations of them, will be on the hook for the nearly \$3 trillion—the amount borrowed plus interest to finance war operations over the last decade. Until now, most people barely noticed the dollar cost because it was on the national credit card. But whether they tossed tea or piled pennies or filled out forms in April, the American people are beginning to notice that the bills are coming due. ■

**FRIDA BERRIGAN**, a contributing editor to *In These Times*, is a Senior Program Associate at the New America Foundation’s Arms and Security Initiative.

---

### **GET INVOLVED**

**War Resisters League**  
[www.warresisters.org](http://www.warresisters.org)

**National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee**  
[www.nwtrcc.org/](http://www.nwtrcc.org/)

**Peace Economy Project**  
[www.peaceeconomyproject.org/site/weblog.php](http://www.peaceeconomyproject.org/site/weblog.php)

**Beyond War, A New Economy Is Possible: Yes We Can!**  
[www.unitedforpeace.org/article.php?id=4010](http://www.unitedforpeace.org/article.php?id=4010)

# Battling Over Employee Free Choice

The fate of labor's top legislative priority is in the Senate's hands

BY DAVID MOBERG

**W**HEN CONGRESS VOTES ON the Employee Free Choice Act, it will decide not only whether workers will be able to organize unions more easily and whether America will build a stronger economy based on shared prosperity. It will also decide how democratic America will be.

The fate of the proposed legislation hinges on a few senators under intense pressure from corporations. But labor leaders remain optimistic that the legislation will pass—most likely with some tweaks.

“We’re definitely in a tough fight,” says Stewart Acuff, assistant to AFL-CIO president John Sweeney. “This is the largest grassroots campaign in labor history. We’re going to play it out as hard and strong as we can.”

The legislation, a top union priority supported by President Obama, would provide legal recognition of a union at a workplace if a majority of workers signed statements of support. Now, even if a huge majority of workers sign union cards, employers can demand that the National Labor Relations Board hold an election, giving the company and anti-union consultants time to bully employees into voting against unionization.

The bill would also stiffen penalties for all-too-common employer violations of labor law—such as firing union supporters—and provide the option of mediation and arbitration of first contracts when employers balk at serious bargaining.

Business groups and their right-wing allies focus on claims the law would deny workers’ right to a secret ballot, which they portray as the hallmark of democracy. But businesses clearly oppose the bill not for any alleged democratic shortcomings but because they oppose unions. In doing so,



On March 9, supporters of the Employee Free Choice Act carry money bags at a rally in Lafayette Square in Washington, D.C.

they oppose freedom of association, a bedrock democratic principle.

## Minority rule

Workers can join political or community groups at will, without secret ballots, but can only form unions without a ballot if the boss agrees. Most employers make union elections as much a free and democratic expression of workers’ views as North Korea’s secret ballots.

The congressional process of deciding on the legislation is a little more democratic, but still deeply flawed. A solid majority in the House voted for EFCA in 2007, but while a majority in the Senate would now, supporters need 60 votes for cloture, or ending debate. With the recent defection of Pennsylvania’s Arlen Specter to the Democratic Party (and assuming

Al Franken becomes Minnesota’s new senator), Democrats and independent supporters will number 60. That means Dems will in theory have the votes needed to end an inevitable EFCA filibuster.

But in March, Specter, who co-sponsored EFCA in 2007, said he would no longer support cloture on the bill, reiterating this point when he announced his party switch in April. And Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.), from the home state of notoriously anti-union Wal-Mart and Tyson Foods, said she would not support EFCA in its current form because it is too “divisive.”

Both senators face re-election next year. Running on the Democratic ticket, even with Obama’s promised support, Specter could face a significant progressive primary challenge. Specter’s switch is

more likely to increase the likelihood of a compromise than win EFCA 60 votes. That could leave labor a tough choice between a stale half loaf today or a possible whole loaf in the next Congress.

Since the 40-plus senators now supporting a filibuster disproportionately come from less populated states, a tiny minority is undemocratically blocking expanded democracy for the majority.

In fact, a clear majority of Americans favor EFCA's provisions, according to surveys by Hart Research. After pollsters described EFCA reforms, 73 percent of Americans surveyed supported it (including 69 percent in right-to-work states). Even when respondents heard the most potent arguments on both sides, strong—albeit smaller—majorities supported EFCA by margins of about 19 percent.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and a shadowy network of front groups have kept most businesses—even those who accepted majority sign-up to recognize a union—toeing a hard line against the bill.

But some small business owners around the country have spoken out for EFCA as good for business and the economy. "We need a strong working middle class or my business will suffer," says Darren Horndash, owner of the 33-store Wisconsin Vision optical chain. He says his unionized employees' loyal performance helps retain customers.

Corporate opponents claim widespread unionizing will shut down businesses and cost jobs, but a new study by the Economic Policy Institute concludes that "the biggest fear voiced by employer groups regarding unionization—that it will inevitably drive them out of business—has no evidentiary basis."

And a new Center for Economic and Policy Research study, led by Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Thomas Kochan, argues that unions are associated with high-performance workplaces yielding 15 to 30 percent "performance premiums" in efficiency, quality, employee engagement and profitability.

### **Cracks in the monolith?**

One group of big companies—partly unionized Costco and staunchly anti-union Whole Foods and Starbucks—has

broken with the hard-line Chamber of Commerce. The companies have proposed quicker elections, before which unions and business would both have access to workers. But it opposes majority sign-up and arbitration, and also proposes a new right of employers to initiate union decertification. While unacceptable to unions, the group's proposal shows cracks in the corporate monolith.

## **Sen. Arlen Specter (D-Pa.), who has proposed making it illegal for union organizers to visit workers' homes without prior consent, will likely face a progressive primary challenge in the Fall.**

Unions are keeping up the fight for EFCA as proposed, but they acknowledge changes may be needed to win over 60 senators. If Lincoln and Specter can be persuaded to help end a filibuster, they're confident all other Democrats will as well.

"Taking steps to rebalance the playing field was always going to be tough," says Change to Win Executive Director Chris Chafe. "But we're still in a strong position to achieve major labor law reform ... It will look a great deal like [EFCA]."

Some changes—such as designing sign-up cards that explicitly give workers the choice of an election or immediate approval of the union or lengthening the time before arbitration can be requested—would not seriously compromise the legislation. But many proposals, including one from Specter that would bar union organizers from visiting workers' homes without prior consent, would tilt the playing field even more against unions.

Likely proposals to mandate elections within a short time—say, five to 10 days after a union petition—are problematic, even if unions got equal access to workers. "It takes a short time for employers to poison the well," one organizer explained. Indeed, the fundamental problem is that employer speech in a workplace is inherently coercive, since the boss has power over a worker's job.

"We are weighing a bunch of options, but the last thing we want to do is make the mistake of the other side and bully or threaten people," AFL-CIO's Acuff says.

"It doesn't work well, but it also points out what we're trying to stop—the bullying and intimidation every day in the workplace."

### **A Tough Fight**

Unions have maintained a steady push for EFCA, including more than 400 actions during Congress' spring break. They've mobilized non-union supporters and given prominent roles to workers with

personal stories to tell, like Colorado electrician Dan Luevano.

In 2005 Luevano and most of his fellow workers at Ries Electric near Denver asked their boss to recognize the Electrical Workers as their union to help resolve problems. The boss called everyone in and threatened to fire them if they voted for a union. Luevano said he would, and the next workday he was fired. Though the National Labor Relations Board reinstated him, his boss isolated him and cut his hours while continuing to violate labor laws by fighting the union.

Luevano eventually left Ries Electric for a union firm. But he has told his story in community forums and interviews, and in congressional hearings and meetings with Colorado senators.

"I wouldn't want anyone to go through what I went through," he says. "I'm not a professional lobbyist, just a working person, trying to make life better for my co-workers and our families." By doing so, Luevano is also trying to make America better—and more democratic. It's a tough fight. ■

---

### **GET INVOLVED**

**Employee Free Choice Act-oriented websites:**

[www.freechoiceact.org/page/s/araw](http://www.freechoiceact.org/page/s/araw)

[www.unionvoice.org/campaign/passefca\\_II](http://www.unionvoice.org/campaign/passefca_II)

[www.americanrightsatwork.org/employee-free-choice-act/](http://www.americanrightsatwork.org/employee-free-choice-act/)

[www.seiu.org/employeeefreechoice/](http://www.seiu.org/employeeefreechoice/)



# Shilling on the Corporate Dollar

## Business-sponsored 'scholars' deliver anti-union talking points

BY ART LEVINE

**T**ESTIFYING BEFORE THE SENATE labor and health committee hearing in March, economist Anne Layne-Farrar of the corporate consulting firm LECG warned about the horrendous impact of the Employee Free Choice Act. Its potential to increase union membership from between five and 10 percent, she said, "would result in an increase in the unemployment of around one and a half to three percentage points. These are sizable effects for the U.S. economy." Earnest and well-prepared, Layne-Farrar cited her study that concluded that 600,000 jobs would be lost in the first year after the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) became law. Fox "Fair and Balanced" News, naturally, in its TV report neglected to mention that her "research" was funded by the corporate-friendly, anti-union "Alliance to Save Main Street Jobs."

Since the report's publication in March, this statistic has circulated through the media, showing up on MSNBC, CBS News, *The Wall Street Journal* and, in spades, Fox News. EFCA has been Swift-Boated for purportedly taking away the secret ballot from workers. But union supporters say it will level the playing field, offering workers the choice of whether to form a union either through an election or "card check"—the majority sign-up of authorization cards. Plus it toughens penalties and mandates arbitration after 120 days if employers refuse to negotiate in good faith.

Yet business interests have used Layne-Farrar's study and that of prolific legal scholar Richard Epstein of the University of Chicago to tell a different story. Ads citing the "600,000" statistic appeared on *Politico* and other political insider publications aimed at buttressing anti-union lobbying that targets moderate senators such



On April 2 in New York, job seekers line up to apply for non-union positions at American Apparel, a store that sells clothes made by non-union workers.

as Arlen Specter and Blanche Lincoln, who subsequently backed away from the EFCA legislation.

Epstein, by some measures the third-most cited law professor in the country, has issued two major reports and five op-eds for the *Wall Street Journal* and other publications denouncing EFCA as a job-killing, unconstitutional "regime." His wide-ranging attack on the pro-union bill for Stanford University's Hoover Institution was paid for by the same Alliance to Save Main Street Jobs that subsidized Layne-Farrar's work. In the past Epstein, an extreme libertarian, has attacked minimum wage and unemployment benefits, denouncing such New Deal legislation as unconstitutional "takings" that violate the Fifth Amendment. That is no surprise. Epstein has argued that, historically, sweatshop conditions can only be ameliorated by market forces, not by laws or unions.

He told *In These Times*: "The level of wages will be determined by the intersection of supply and demand... the escape from that system is not driven by unions, which cannot increase productivity."

Epstein's past work is even a bit too radical for his business backers. He told *In These Times* that he is "unrepentant" about his earlier writings, but he concedes that his corporate-funded sponsors have asked him to omit some of those previous arguments when attacking EFCA.

### Counter-attack by progressives

Progressive bloggers, law professors and economists have launched counter-attacks, but these conservatives' talking points, theories, and, most importantly, their data cannot be easily marginalized. In fact, they strengthen the hyperbolic rantings comparing the bill to the Gestapo or Islamic terrorism, claims that may seem

laughable to progressives, but set the tenor for the debate in Washington. And Layne-Farrar's and Epstein's conclusions serve as the academic veneer for the PR blitz that has tried to demonize the Employee Free Choice Act.

Despite the wide dissemination of Layne-Farrar's report, critics like Chris Kromm of the Institute of Southern Living have found distortions and shoddy analysis in her work. Of the 10 Canadian provinces she studied, Kromm discovered that only three actually had significant changes in card check rules. She found that the report itself acknowledged there wasn't enough data to draw conclusions about the impact of card check. It further admitted that the provincial card check data they did collect was too "weak" for economic analysis. Kromm also wondered, "If unions really were the cause of unemployment, why has Canadian unemployment risen in recent years ... even as union membership has declined?"

But Layne-Farrar massages the data using a complex "regression analysis" to connect the dots between card check, higher unionization rates and more unemployment, putting the loss at between 600,000 and 2.6 million new American jobs in the first year.

"That's bullshit," says Canadian labor economist Charlotte Yates, now the Dean of Social Sciences at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. "I don't know of any credible economists who say [now] there is a direct correlation between unionization and the rise in unemployment."

Even so, Layne-Farrar invokes her use of "regression analysis" as a sort of holy totem to ward off criticism of her work from other economists who cite what she says are "simplistic correlations." These include studies showing that countries such as England, Denmark and Norway have higher unionization and lower unemployment rates than the United States. She says, "This is empirical analysis, not an opinion piece, with results based on publicly available data and using well-accepted econometric tools. You can't rig these."

John DiNardo, a labor economist at the University of Michigan and author of the textbook *Econometrics* retorts, "Just because she calls it 'econometrics' and 'regres-

sion analysis' doesn't mean that it makes any sense." While some earlier research had found a link between unionization and unemployment, more rigorous, recent research in Europe and the United States has found no connection between unionization and unemployment. In fact, Layne-Farrar's study concocts a negative jobs impact from unionization that is 200 to 300

percent higher than even the most critical anti-union research.

### Behind the statistical wizardry

Here's where it helps to look behind the curtain of her statistical wizardry designed to dazzle common folk and legislators alike with econometrics. Her regression analysis supposedly aims to tease out the factors driving unemployment increases. But, DiNardo says, if unemployment shoots up and the unionized percentage of the workforce goes up, that could just as well be caused by more non-union workers getting laid off—while union members still keep their jobs. Hence, the percentage of unionized workers increases.

How do you get around this thorny problem if you want to blame unions for unemployment? Layne-Farrar purportedly "corrected" for the hopeless muddle of such simultaneous factors by, in part, merely measuring the unionization rates a year earlier than the unemployment rates. Presto! Unionization causes massive unemployment, she concludes. "She has very poor research design," says DiNardo. "She doesn't have anything resembling a natural experiment." And he says that his review of the economic impact in America of unionization shows the "the casual effect of union recognition is zero."

But for Epstein, the virtually unanimous opposition of business groups to the pro-labor legislation is proof positive that it will be "a job-killer of the worst sort." In his report for the Hoover Institution, he paints an Edenic portrait of a non-union-

ized labor market, and laments the passage of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935 that legalized unions. "If the National Labor Relations Act offends every principle of the voluntary exchange of private property, this new bill is much worse," he says. "I've never seen a statute so draconian."

Epstein is the labor market equivalent of *Candide's* Dr. Pangloss: If employers

## Richard Epstein, who has attacked the minimum wage and unemployment benefits, argues that sweatshop conditions can only be ameliorated by market forces, not by laws and unions.

could just be left alone, all things work for the best in this best of all possible worlds. If there were no minimum wages laws, for instance, Epstein told me, "Wages would go up because productivity gains would offset any short-term losses [to workers]."

Such anti-union assertions don't take into account the real world of employment—and the justifiable fear of being fired. Kim Bobo, author of *Wage Theft*, asks, "What bubble does he live in?" Even the Bush labor board found that nearly 30,000 workers are illegally fired or discriminated against each year because of union activity. And these researchers don't really consider the widespread estimated \$19 billion in wage theft.

While Epstein's more radical views are left off the table, his intellectual firepower adds to the impact of his arguments against EFCA. Both Epstein and Layne-Farrar see an idealized world waiting to be born where unions don't exist, and where workers and businesses thrive without them.

The question remains, will Washington politicians still listen to business interests that use these researchers' dubious claims to argue, as Epstein does: "Unions are a bad deal for most workers." ■

**ART LEVINE**, a contributing editor of *The Washington Monthly*, has written for *Mother Jones*, *The American Prospect*, *The Atlantic*, *Slate.com* and *Salon.com*. Levine is the co-host of the "D'Antoni and Levine" show on *BlogTalk Radio*, every Thursday at 5:30 p.m. ET, and blogs at *The Huffington Post*.

# The Only Road Out of Crisis

Yes, it is socialism, but nationalize the banks already

BY JOSEPH M. SCHWARTZ

**S**INCE TAKING OFFICE, PRESIDENT Barack Obama and his economic team have confronted a daunting financial crisis with a string of solutions that have been hard to sell to a wary public.

Obama's first problem is that his administration's bank rescue has failed to break with the discredited Bush administration plan—throwing taxpayer funds at insolvent banks to put off their inevitable nationalization by the Federal Deposit Insurance Company (FDIC).

On March 23, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner proposed the latest rescue for big banks, whose “legacy assets” of housing-based financial derivatives have tanked in value. Geithner's Public-Private Investment Program (PPIP) tries to revive the market for these toxic assets by having the government insure their value.

Some major financial institutions, such as Bank of America and Citigroup, are what Princeton economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman calls “zombie banks.” They live as private entities only because of the endless infusion of government funds that swamp their private stock market equity value.

Despite this quasi-nationalization, the Obama administration did not initially demand equity shares and, thus, majority management control in these banks. And after the stock market reacted negatively to an April 19 *New York Times* report that the administration was considering converting government-owned bank warrants (essentially loans) to common stock, the proposal has gone unmentioned. But even going through with this measure (which would shore up the banks' balance sheets) doesn't mean the government will demand control of the banks' management.

Federal regulators are doing their best to



On Feb. 20, a trader signals an offer in the Standard & Poors 500 stock index futures pit at the Chicago Merchantile Exchange after the White House calmed worries that the government would nationalize insolvent banks.

SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES

hide the dire situation of our megabanks, thus delaying official acknowledgment of their insolvency. The regulators have let banks off the hook, sparing them from having to “mark to market” declining assets while allowing them to use the declining prices of their bonds (which will have to be paid off in full if held to maturity) to lower their total liabilities. Thus, the recent quarterly reports of bank profits are largely accounting fictions.

## Investors fail to renew lending

So far, the banks have gladly taken government funds, using them to shore-up their deteriorating balance sheets rather than to engage in renewed lending. A *Wall Street Journal* analysis published on April 20 shows the biggest recipients of taxpayer aid made or refinanced 23 percent fewer loans in February than in October—the

month Treasury launched the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). Although massive federal aid to financial institutions has failed to unlock the frozen credit markets, under PPIP, Geithner proposes to spend up to \$1 trillion more in federal funds and insurance guarantees to create a “private market” for legacy assets.

“We cannot solve this crisis without making it possible for investors to take risks,” Geithner wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed.

Yet under PPIP, the federal government asks private investors (mostly the very hedge funds and private equity funds that speculated in these troubled assets in the first place) to risk just 7 percent of the purchase price of these assets. The federal government (that is, the taxpayers) will not only risk its own 7 percent but will also loan the banks the other 86 percent of the



auction purchase price through the FDIC or Federal Reserve.

If the price of the asset has fallen more than 7 percent below the original auction purchase when the loan comes due in a few years, taxpayers will assume the loss on the value of the loan. That is, the public treasury will assume the risk on 93 percent of the private market purchase price, with the private sector risking only its original 7 percent investment.

Geithner knows that now there is no private market for these worthless assets—hence his plan to bribe private investors to get into the toxic-asset market. So much for a capitalist market that rewards successful risk and penalizes failure.

Here's a better plan: Rather than continuing to pay inflated prices for toxic assets that cannot be sold on a truly private market, the government should simply take those assets off the books of distressed financial institutions, so that their balance sheets can be restored to health.

Just as in the Savings and Loan crisis of the early 1980s, the FDIC should take over insolvent banks and other financial institutions, place their presently valueless assets into a Resolution Trust Company and restructure the banks so that healthier balance sheets would support renewed lending.

Once the financial firms have regained their health, the FDIC could either resell them to private investors or the government could choose to run the banks. When, and if, the housing market recovers, so will the value of the toxic assets. The Resolution Trust Company could sell the toxic assets to private investors without expensive guarantees, and use the proceeds to repay the Treasury a portion of the funds the government infused into the banking system.

Critics—including conservative pundits and some moderate Democrats—claim the federal government does not have the capacity to run megabanks. But in practice, little would change in terms of the bureaucratic structure of the institutions. Nationalization only involves firing the top layer of management; mid-level managerial personnel would stay on, under the supervision of skilled FDIC administrators (recently unemployed bank managers would be glad to work for the FDIC).

Finally, rather than reselling all the restructured, nationalized banks to private investors, the federal government should maintain full ownership of at least one major bank. This bank could serve as a benchmark institution, setting standards for investment in community housing, alternative energy development and infrastructure that other private banks would have to match.

## **The federal government should maintain ownership of one major bank—a benchmark institution that would set standards that other banks would have to match.**

### **The disaster of deregulation**

It's one thing to fix the current crisis, but preventing a repeat will require reflection on how this happened in the first place. The disastrous experience of financial deregulation demonstrates that without public regulatory restraint, finance capital will engage in irresponsible acts of speculative swindling during financial booms and resort to excessively conservative lending during financial busts.

The deregulation of the financial industry has been a 30-year joint project of Republican monetarists and Democratic neo-liberals. This "free market" project began with the Carter administration's deregulation of the Savings and Loans. It accelerated under Reagan's gutting of the entire government regulatory apparatus, and culminated with the Clinton administration's abolition of the Glass-Steagall Act, which had separated commercial banks from investment firms. Now, the very banks that create risky financial instruments also market these instruments to their own clients.

To restore a sane credit system, the federal government must first take the fiscally prudent step of nationalizing and restructuring insolvent financial institutions. Then the Obama administration must recreate an effective regulatory system for domestic financial institutions and cooperate with governments of other advanced and developing economies to build a global financial regulatory system that favors productive investment over speculation.

The other story behind our current economic crisis is global, neo-liberal capitalism's race-to-the-bottom. Transnational corporations that scour the globe for the lowest labor costs fail to pay workers enough to purchase the goods and services they produce. Only if Chinese and Southeast Asian workers can form independent trade unions will they be able to force employers to pay them wages suffi-

cient to consume the goods they produce.

In developed nations, with wages failing to keep up with productivity increases, workers went into debt to forestall declining living standards, which temporarily put off the impending global crisis of overproduction and underconsumption.

In the end, restoring a stable global economic system will require raising the floor under global living standards and working conditions and creating global regulatory institutions that insure that investment and trade benefit all working people.

The era of deregulatory free-market mania is crashing down upon us. We must revive the capacity of democratic governments to regulate the economy to serve people's needs rather than the speculative desires of corporate elites to recover from the current global economic nightmare. ■

**JOSEPH M. SCHWARTZ** is a professor of political science at Temple University. He is a Vice-Chair of Democratic Socialists of America and the author, most recently, of *The Future of Democratic Equality: Reconstructing Social Solidarity in a Fragmented U.S.* (Routledge, 2009).

---

### **GET INVOLVED**

**Democratic Socialists of America**  
[www.dsusa.org](http://www.dsusa.org)

**A New Way Forward is organizing around the demands of "Nationalize, Reorganize, and Decentralize"**  
[www.anewwayforward.org](http://www.anewwayforward.org)

**Acorn's "Stop Foreclosures Campaign"**  
[www.acorn.org](http://www.acorn.org)

BY GEORGE KENNEY

## Unraveling Afghanistan

**The United States has two abiding national security interests in South Asia: preventing a nuclear war between Pakistan and India, and averting the proliferation of atomic weapons. The United States should work towards South Asian nuclear arms reductions, or even disarmament.**

But it must also find innovative ways to help Pakistan maintain internal political stability. Current U.S. policy approaches the challenge ass-backwards. Instead of acknowledging a nuclear threat, we've propped up an illegitimate, corrupt government in Kabul and picked a fight with the Pashtun people that fundamentally destabilizes Pakistan. Approximately 40 million Pashtuns, an Eastern Iranian people that have successfully resisted British and Russian control in the past, live on either side of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The longer we stay this course, the worse things will get. How can we change the mission without a domino effect of political collapse that adds to the nuclear risk?

Jonathan Landay, the senior national security and intelligence correspondent for McClatchey Newspapers, performs an invaluable service in reporting on various dimensions of this quandary. It's impossible to second-guess his conclusion that a precipitous U.S. withdrawal would be catastrophic. Less clear is whether we have the time, or intelligence, to come up with a workable plan. I spoke with Landay in March, shortly after his return from a month in Afghanistan.

**You spoke to many Afghans who shared their frustrations with you. Can local U.S. and NATO units successfully address any of their complaints?**

About a year and a half ago, there was a recommendation by some American

commanders that they would not be able to, as some U.S. officials are now saying, "kill their way to victory." Yet the guidance under the Bush administration was, essentially, to go after al Qaeda, the Taliban and associated militants. There was really no counterinsurgency strategy despite the fact that the United States had practiced counterinsurgency in other places, particularly in Vietnam, and was well aware of what that strategy entails.

American commanders recognized this and began trying to address that problem at a local level, primarily, using funds they had available—quick-fix projects. But it wasn't sufficient, and I think the new administration recognizes that. You certainly hear more willingness to speak frankly about what's happening in Afghanistan. As President Obama and others, including National Security Advisor James Jones, have acknowledged, the United States is not winning there. And now there are pretty intense efforts to turn that around—to address it and bring about reconstruction projects at the local level to try and gain confidence among ordinary Afghans who, eight years since the U.S. intervention, have not seen its promised benefits. The Bush administration promised a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan that it did not deliver.

Another thing contributing to this

sense of betrayal is the absolutely epidemic, record-breaking corruption taking place—fueled by an unprecedented amount of foreign currency floating around Afghanistan. And this corruption goes from the cop on the beat right up to the highest levels of the Afghan government. It is eating the heart out of the U.S.-led enterprise.

A further major factor is civilian casualties caused by U.S.-led military operations, despite the fact that the Taliban is responsible for far more civilian deaths than the United States and its allies are. The United States is losing the information battle in that regard.

**Richard Holbrooke, President Obama's Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, recently talked about trying to enlist Iranian help on Afghanistan. Is there a productive way to bring Iran into U.S. policy-making?**

Absolutely. Iran has a huge interest in Afghanistan. The Iranians do not want to see the Taliban return—the Taliban are Sunni fundamentalists, as opposed to the Shiite branch of Islam that is practiced in Iran. The Iranians also have an enormous interest in seeing an end to the world's largest opium production, which takes place in Afghanistan, because they are wrestling with narcotics smuggling and the violence that comes with it. And they want stability because they probably would like to sell their oil and natural gas to Pakistan and India. Afghanistan is also a major marketplace for Iranian goods.

**Is there a way to make a continuing U.S. presence positive for Afghanistan?**

There is, but my question is whether or not the United States has time to do that. A senior NATO officer said to me, "Afghanistan is a nation of fence-sitters." The U.S. military was the first foreign military in history that the Afghans, for the most



**Jonathan Landay and an Afghan soldier at the Afghan National Army base in the Jalez Valley in Wardak Province.**

part, welcomed into their country. That goodwill has been wasted by the previous administration. The Obama administration recognizes that, but after eight years, the question is: Is there still time left to reassure Afghans that the United States is not in their country as part of a war against Islam? This is the view that was created in the Muslim world based on the Bush administration—who were careless and arrogant in the execution of their policies, particularly in Afghanistan. Their policy was: Let's patronize the warlords as our proxy to hold this place as we take our troops, money and time and invade Iraq. By doing that, they reinstated many of the hated elements whose misbehavior, exploitation and repression were what gave rise to the Taliban, who in turn allowed al Qaeda to use Afghanistan as its sanctuary.

**You said you're unsure how much time we have left. In talking with U.S. military personnel, is that a subject on their minds?**

They're aware they are in a race against

time. The United States has to regain the confidence of the Afghan people if it hopes to contain the Taliban insurgency because the insurgents need the people—they're fish that swim among the people. But if you drain the sea, they have nowhere to swim. Whether by choice or out of anger at their government or the United States, there are people who are willing to provide the Taliban with sanctuary, shelter, food, and recruits. That's the sea that's got to be drained, and that hasn't happened in the last eight years.

Is there still time to do that before this becomes more than the Taliban insurgency—before it turns into a general insurgency out of anger at the "occupier"? We haven't reached that stage yet because the Taliban are enormously unpopular. Afghans don't want to revert back, but the more they become convinced that the U.S. and NATO presence is an occupation rather than a liberation, the more chance that you'll see people supporting the Taliban.

**If we do run out of time and the**

**Obama administration decides on an orderly withdrawal, leaving Afghanistan to its own devices, what would be the consequences?**

Failed state. Very quickly. At this stage, despite the progress made in building the Afghan army, there are very few people who believe that the Taliban could be held back from taking Kabul for very long. And then you have the implosion of Afghanistan, you have a new civil war, and you have a new sanctuary for al Qaeda. There would be a new base for these Islamic militants. This would be a gigantic boost for them, and their next target would be Islamabad.

**What is your bottom line?**

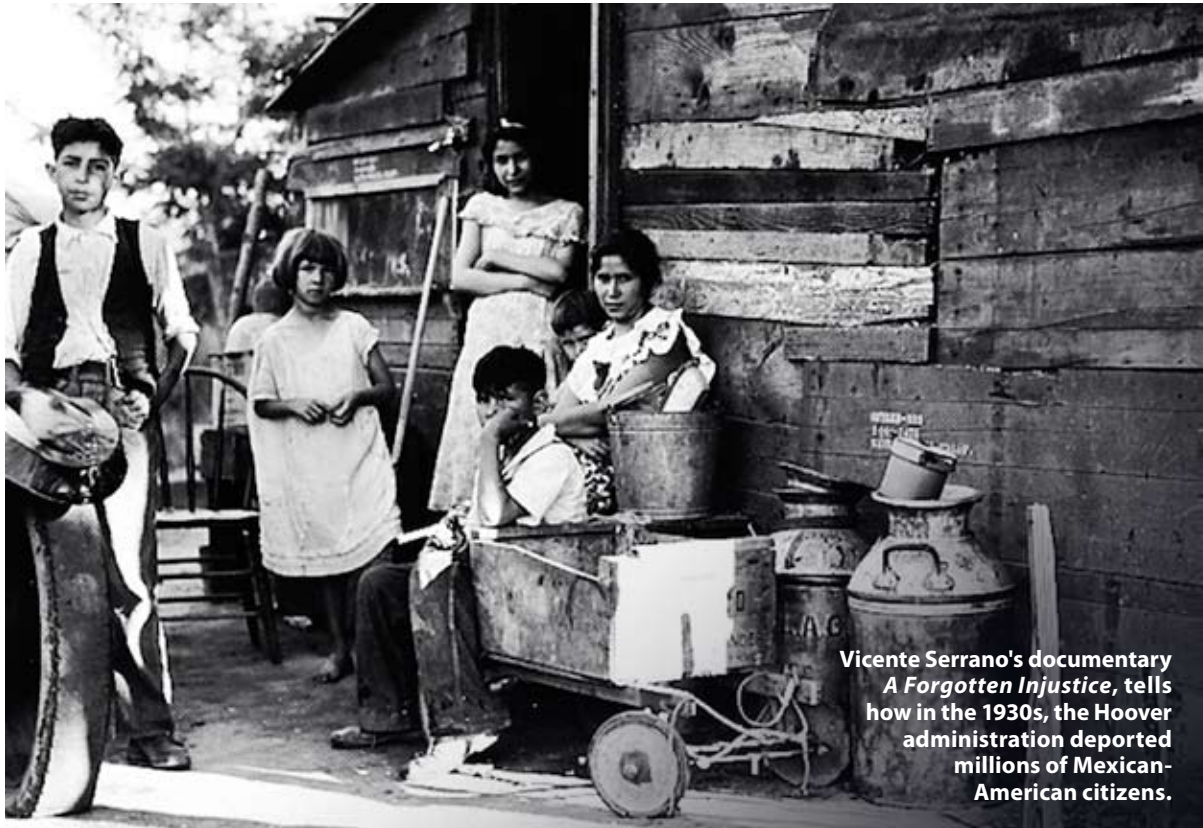
That, at this point, there are two major reasons why things are going wrong. One is the corruption that the Americans are doing nothing to stop. Corruption is undermining and helping to accelerate the lack of confidence and the frustration and anger of the Afghan people.

The second problem is one of misperception. As I said, a NATO official remarked to me on how Afghanistan is a nation of fence sitters—one reason why people have been unable to make their minds up about which side to join is because of the infiltration of the Taliban into their areas and the inability of the government and the United States to stop it. If you're an ordinary Afghan and you think the Taliban is winning, which side are you going to go to?

The United States has a very serious problem with trying to correct misperceptions. I don't think there's any question that the Taliban would lose in a military conflict with the United States, but this ability to infiltrate has created the impression that they can win. As long as the United States and its allies are there, the Taliban is not an existential military threat to the Afghan government. What is an existential threat is the perception that they are winning. ■

**GEORGE KENNEY**, a member of the In These Times Board of Editors, is a former career U.S. foreign service officer. He resigned in 1991 over U.S. policy toward the Yugoslav conflict. This interview is adapted from a podcast on [www.electronicpolitics.com](http://www.electronicpolitics.com), which he produces and hosts.





Vicente Serrano's documentary *A Forgotten Injustice*, tells how in the 1930s, the Hoover administration deported millions of Mexican-American citizens.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHICANO FILMS

BY LOU MATTEI

## Home Again?

With the economy in a rut and anxieties about national security festering in the nether regions of America's social conscience, it's minorities—immigrants, outsiders, heathens, you name it—who now, as in the past, bear the brunt of the

backlash. Tolerance sounds swell so long as the Dow cries kowabunga. But when fat cats go belly up and "real Americans" fill unemployment lines, fear takes over.

Vicente Serrano's documentary *A Forgotten Injustice* chronicles our ability to turn against our brothers and sisters during times of social panic. The film tells the hidden history of the mass deportation of more than 2 million Mexican immigrants in the 1930s. More than 60 percent of those given the boot were U.S. citizens who ended up living in Mexico as illegal aliens.

Serrano's own grandmother was deported from Los Angeles in the 1930s and ended up living in

Mexico for 70 years as an illegal alien. It was her story that, six years ago, inspired the Chicago-based, Emmy-winning Telemundo journalist to start working on *A Forgotten Injustice*.

"When I learned about the magnitude of the injustices of the '30s. I felt a responsibility to tell the story of my grandma, her brother and the more than 1 million people," says Serrano. "I always wondered why my grandmother's stories ended with tears."

The historical saga behind Serrano's film stems from World War I, when American businessmen sent teams to Mexico to recruit replacements for the farmers and factory workers drafted into the army. At the time nobody bothered with documen-

tation or official papers. By 1930, programs like these (called *reenganches*) helped balloon the population of Mexican-Americans to 3.5 million.

When the Great Depression hit, President Herbert Hoover came up with a plan to deport Mexicans under the banner “American jobs for real Americans.” The reasoning, besides overt racism, was that it was cheaper to deport Mexicans than other groups of immigrants because of the proximity of the border.

But when Los Angeles County opened up a deportation office to carry out President Hoover’s plan, it faced a serious jurisdiction problem: Only the federal government is allowed to enforce immigration laws. So the term “repatriation” was coined to gloss over a dubious legal situation—and to try to dupe more than 1 million citizens born and raised in the United States into feeling like they were returning home to a country they’d never been to before.

To make these deportations seem voluntary, the government told recalcitrant Mexican-Americans that they were going to be cut off from federal aid at a time when nearly 20 percent of the country relied upon it. Violence and intimidation put muscle behind the threat of expulsion.

Raymond Rodriguez, coauthor of *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*, says in the film: “Groups of vigilante-type individuals would come onto a Mexican labor camp and say, ‘If you guys aren’t out of here in the morning, we’re burning you out.’ So people left. Or, in other instances, people would be forced to leave by the sheriff coming to your place, putting a gun to your head and saying, ‘If you don’t leave, you’re dying.’”

According to Francisco Balderrama, the other author of *Decade of Betrayal*, “If you think about the forceful tactics of the county agencies, the forceful tactics of those employers like U.S. Steel, Ford Motor Company, Southern Pacific Railroad, or the forceful tactics that one reads in the press ... without any distinction made in terms of citizenship or legal status, it was coercion, plain and simple.”

Civic groups like the L.A. Chamber of

Commerce celebrated that “many Mexicans are absolutely terrorized and are ready to do anything to get out of Los Angeles.”

On the other side of the border, muralist Diego Rivera was fronting a push by the Mexican government to reclaim

greeted by emotional survivors.

“I think that is another beautiful experience of working on *A Forgotten Injustice*,” Serrano says, “creating an opportunity to organize and engage people in healthier debates about social justice, immigration, civil rights ... I hope this film brings

## **The Hoover administration, while racist, also reasoned that it was cheaper to deport Mexicans than other groups of immigrants because of the relative proximity of the border.**

the population that America was trying to expel. His hope was that “repatriates” would return with personal and social virtues acquired by living in the United States. In reality, “repatriates” came back poorer to a country—and in many cases a language—they didn’t know.

Amazingly, during World War II, when draft letters showed up at these expatriates’ homes, many were eager for the opportunity to serve.

“To me that was so strange and sad because they wanted me to defend the U.S. after they had kicked me out and sent me to Mexico,” says Jose Lopez in the film. He was repatriated from Detroit, Mich., in 1931, but was still willing to serve. “Naturally, I would have done it with pride, I think. But then they told me that I was too small, and they didn’t accept me.”

Behind the “repatriation” campaign lurks a specious interpretation of the Constitution. Lawmakers exploited the vague language on citizenship in the 14th amendment to validate the repatriation of undocumented immigrants—including those who would be considered legal citizens today. It’s the same ambiguity exploited today by nativists who see “anchor babies” as weapons in an us-versus-them conflict of immigration.

But Serrano’s story may have found an opening. In April, *A Forgotten Injustice* was featured at the Chicago Latino Film Festival. And Serrano has been screening the film as often as possible, holding Q&A sessions afterward, where he’s often

people with different views to a common place and serious debate about the issues.”

Following its 2003 investigation into the “repatriation” campaigns of the 1930s, the California State Senate apologized for the state’s role in the illegal deportations and, in 2007, passed a resolution requiring its history to be taught in public schools. A similar measure was approved by the Illinois State Senate in March and is currently under consideration in the House. But a bill to fund an investigation into this period, introduced into the U.S. House of Representatives in 2006 by now-Labor Secretary Hilda Solis and co-sponsored by Obama’s Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, among others, went nowhere.

“I believe that people that don’t know their history are condemned to repeat it,” says Serrano. “Every time there is an economic crisis, society looks for a ‘bad guy’ or a scapegoat. It happened in the 1930s, and it can happen today if we don’t do anything to avoid committing the same mistakes. Just listen to some of the hate language used today: invasion, massive deportations, ‘American’ jobs. ... It is the same language used in the 1930s. Obviously the times are different, and probably the context is different as well, but the outcome can be the same.” ■

**LOU MATTEI**, a graduate of Ohio State University, is an intern at *In These Times* and an associate editor at *What’s Happening! Community Newspapers on Chicago’s North Shore*.

## BOOKS

# Coal Mountain Elementary

By Kari Lydersen

**A**N ELEMENTARY SCHOOL curriculum designed by the American Coal Foundation suggests that students learn about the costs and benefits of coal mining by using toothpicks and paper clips to “mine” chocolate chips out of cookies. They also go about “reclaiming” the “land” damaged in the process by tracing the cookies’ outline on graph paper. Costs are to be calculated by the amount of time spent per chip and the expanse of graph paper that needs to be reclaimed.

One of the discussion questions to follow the lesson is: “What do you think are some of the costs associated with mining coal?”

In poet and organizer Mark Nowak’s new book *Coal Mountain Elementary*, this question is placed on an otherwise blank page. On the adjacent page is a photo from Sago, W. Va., of a sign, in bedraggled removable plastic letters and missing an “i”: “Pray for our mining families.”

On Jan. 2, 2006, an explosion in the Sago mine trapped 13 miners for two days; only one made it out alive. The rescue efforts and release of information to the public were botched and/or intentionally manipulated by the company. The night of Jan. 3, families were given false hope by erroneous media reports that 12 miners were miraculously still alive. Investigations in the wake of the disaster revealed a long history of safety violations and apparent misconduct by mine owner International Coal Group.

“It was devastation heaped upon devastation, tragedy piled upon tragedy,” says Nowak, who got the idea for the book while doing workshops with Sago residents about six weeks after the disaster.

*Coal Mountain Elementary* is an artful, stark and slightly surreal weave of several narratives that portray the human toll of coal mining on families and communities and the way the industry is embed-

ded in our global society, in part through highly strategic efforts like the American Coal Foundation’s curriculum.

The book is a collage of excerpts from the curriculum, testimony from the Sago disaster, news reports of mining disasters in China, and desolate yet eerily beautiful photos of Sago and of Chinese miners and mines. (The breathtaking Chinese photos are by photojournalist Ian Teh.)

The stranger-than-fiction curriculum prods students to write inspiring stories about mining company towns and teaches how to make “coal flowers”—lumps of coal adorned with paper and fabric held together by congealing ammonia, salt and “laundry bluing,” which the curriculum helpfully advises can be purchased through women’s magazines.

Nowak sees the book as his contribution to the growing debate over—and opposition to—coal’s role as a primary global energy source. Without preaching or delving into the environmental effects that are documented elsewhere, *Coal Mountain Elementary* shows the inherent danger and violence of the industry, and it quietly celebrates the strength and resilience of miners and their families.

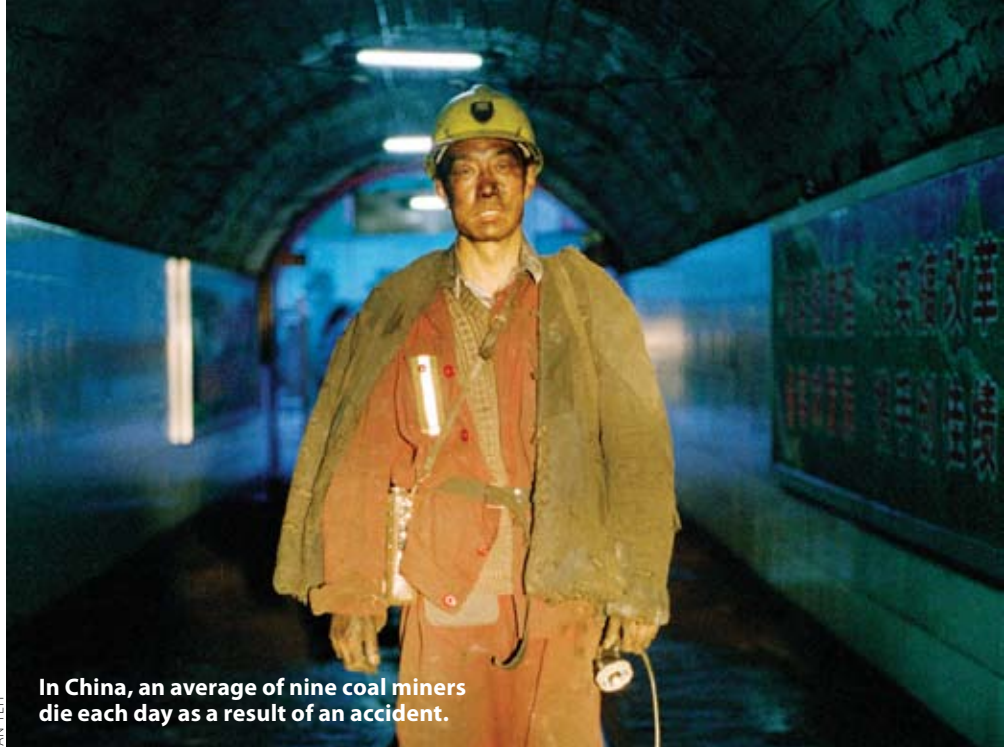
“There probably isn’t another occupation where so many people die at work every day,” notes Nowak, whose blog (<http://coalmountain.wordpress.com>) logs mine accidents around the world. “It’s not a thought most people have when they get

in their car to go to work: Will I come home at night? But around the world, not just in China but Zimbabwe, Ukraine, South Africa, it’s a daily occurrence.”

In April, a play based on the book was performed in Pittsburgh and West Virginia. At one performance, Nowak met relatives of a miner killed in Sago who had brought photos of the memorial service. In a region where coal companies still hold an economic and psychological grip over many communities, Nowak said the play was well received, and he hopes it opened some eyes to the global and multi-layered nature of the coal industry. In China, an average nine miners died each day last year, with cover-ups by local bureaucrats common, and family members and journalists bribed or intimidated into staying silent.

“Every time you go to the Family Dollar or Wal-Mart, probably 70 percent of the stuff there was made in China,” Nowak says. “A lot of people know about the terrible working conditions, but most people are so removed from the fact that those plants are powered through electricity from coal. We are ourselves attached to each and every one of these (mining) disasters through the clothes we wear, the things we purchase.”

Explicitly in the curriculum and implicitly in the testimony and news reports included in the book are cost-benefit analyses. One page quotes the curricu-



In China, an average of nine coal miners die each day as a result of an accident.

IAN TEH



lum “assessment” of the cookie mining: “What costs or possibilities for profit were not included in this exercise?” The facing page quotes a Sago rescuer who, shaking the dead miners, says he tries “to holler at them, tell them to wake up.” He remembers they had taken the time to lay out a curtain on the floor of what became their death chamber.

“You know, coal miners don’t just sit on the mine floor, they always lay something out. And that’s one of the things that stuck in my mind is, they had done that.” ■

## THEATRE

### Drama Queens

By Jean Forst

ON DECEMBER 16, 2002, George Ryan, then governor of Illinois, attended a production of Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen’s “The Exonerated” in Chicago. The play, an unsettling drama

composed of material culled from interviews, transcripts, case files, letters and the public record, tells the stories of six wrongly convicted people.

On January 11, 2003, just a few weeks after viewing the production, Ryan cleared death row. His unprecedented executive act prompted former U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno to effuse that “The Exonerated” will “do more to promote justice than any literary efforts I have seen.”

Yet, the political impact of literature aside, every production must ask: Is the play good theater? Polemics, alone, do not a good play make. Theater critic Alexis Greene and playwright Shirley Lauro, editors of *Front Lines: Political Plays by American Women*, claim their new anthology, which includes “The Exonerated,” features plays that are “theatrical, not polemical.”

Like “The Exonerated,” the six other plays featured in *Front Lines* are political. Cindy Cooper’s “Words of Choice” reso-

nates as profoundly pro-choice. “Elliot, A Soldier’s Fugue,” a 2007 Pulitzer Prize finalist by Quiara Alegria Hudes, tackles the grimness of war. Shirley Lauro’s “Clarence Darrow’s Last Trial” relates the struggles of a broken man. “Mrs. Packard,” by Emily Mann, reproduces the horrors of being wrongly committed for insanity. In “No Child,” Nilaja Sun demonstrates the limitations of the No Child Left Behind Act. And Paula Vogel’s “Hot n’ Throbbing” exposes the shock of domestic violence. The plays address American society as a whole, along with personal concerns.

However, these are not the doggedly didactic dramas of a Clifford Odets or a John Howard Lawson or a Bertolt Brecht. They contain few of the rough scenes that, having drawn in audiences in the 1920s and 1930s, would likely repel theatergoers today. The recollections of the arrests and convictions in “The Exonerated” are delivered with impressive restraint. Even so, few accounts

## [ art space ]



### WAYWARD TRAVELER

In early 2003, CIA agents abducted Egyptian-born cleric Hassan Mustafa Osama Nasr in Milan, Italy, “rendering” him to Cairo, where he was allegedly tortured by Egyptian security agents.

Prior to Nasr’s kidnapping, a CIA officer—now wanted by Italian authorities for his alleged role in the operation—checked into a Milan hotel with a false passport and the name “James Thomas Harbison.” Artist and writer Trevor Paglen used a photocopy of that passport as the basis for his silkscreen work in “Experimental Geography,” a traveling exhibit at the Albuquerque Museum from June to September.

For more information about “Experimental Geography,” visit [www.ici-exhibitions.org](http://www.ici-exhibitions.org). Or check out the illustrated book released with the exhibit at [www.mhpbooks.com](http://www.mhpbooks.com).

—Jeremy Gantz

of human malice or fallibility could so powerfully disarm those in favor of capital punishment.

At the same time, despite the moral clarity of "The Exonerated," the plays often align with the contemporary taste for moral ambiguity and experimental form. In "Mrs. Packard," a complex tension surfaces in the exchanges between Mrs. Packard and Dr. Andrew McFarland as we become aware of his attraction to a woman who might be manipulating her power, or enjoying his attentions. In "Elliot," one story fades as another begins and extends the original, as a fugue advances a line of music. The long and meandering monologues that open "No Child" require a sustained concentration that is abruptly, and significantly, broken by the choppy exchanges that comprise the bulk of the play. "Hot 'n' Throbbing" includes an interesting "voice-over" and a "voice" that provides insight about the violence Clyde inflicts upon Charlene. Yet these creative flourishes don't wholly compensate for simplicity of character and plot. Mrs. Packard is impossibly heroic, and the ending of "No Child" is a little too rosy.

Comparatively, "Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue," seems apolitical. Focusing on a single American family with three generations of war veterans—Korea, Vietnam and, now, Iraq—"Elliot" dramatizes the shared experience of service to one's country. The play suggests the immorality of the Iraq War, as Elliot, the youngest son—a Marine shipped off to the Middle East—considers a second tour of combat. Experiences both common and unique to American foot soldiers form the fibers of this textured play. "Elliot" emerges, then, as a universal, not a specifically anti-war, story. While it captures a soldier's experience, it offers little political critique. Why then, gather it into an anthology of political plays? Because *Front Lines* are not simply "political plays." They are "political plays written by American women."

In their introduction, Greene and Lauro invite us to understand that, since Second Wave feminism, "women's playwriting has accelerated as a means for social and political expression." To this

## excerpt



### SPINE OF THE TIMES

*In an April 25 New York Times article titled "Telling the Brutal Truth," Public Editor Clark Hoyt defended the Time's use of the ameliorative phrase "brutal interrogation techniques," rather than the more reality-based "torture."*

A linguistic shift took place in this newspaper as it reported the details of how the Central Intelligence Agency was allowed to strip Al Qaeda prisoners naked, bash them against walls, keep them awake for up to 11 straight days ... and make them feel as if they were drowning. Until this month, what the Bush administration called "enhanced" interrogation techniques were "harsh" techniques in the news pages of the *Times*. Increasingly, they are "brutal." (On the editorial page, they long ago added up to "torture.")

The choice of a single word involved separate deliberations in New York and the Washington bureau ... The *Times* is displeasing some who think "brutal" is just a timid euphemism for torture ... Robert Ofsevit of Oakland, Calif., asked, "Why can't the *New York Times* call torture by its proper name?" ...

The word ["brutal"] had appeared a few times before in this context, most recently on April 10, when the Central Intelligence Agency said it was closing the network of secret overseas prisons where interrogations took place. Scott Shane, who covers national security, said he and his editor in the Washington bureau, Douglas Jehl, negotiated over the wording of the first paragraph. Shane wrote that methods used in the prisons were "widely denounced as illegal torture." Jehl changed that to the "harshest interrogation methods" since the Sept. 11 attacks. Shane said he felt that with more information coming to light, including a leaked report by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the words "harsh" and even "harshest" no longer sufficed. He proposed "brutal," and Jehl agreed. ... And why not, then, go all the way to torture? Jehl said ... "I have resisted using torture without qualification or to

describe all the techniques. Exactly what constitutes torture continues to be a matter of debate and hasn't been resolved by a court. This president and this attorney general say waterboarding is torture, but the previous president and attorney general said it is not. On what basis should a newspaper render its own verdict, short of charges being filed or a legal judgment rendered?" Jehl argued for precision and caution. I agree.



end, the anthology aims to demonstrate that women can dramatize gritty or unlikely subjects, and upend our sense of what are appropriate topics for female authors. Thus, even the apolitical "Elliot" is reframed as a political play: A woman playwright can indeed tackle the gruesomeness of war. But what then do we make of the fact that the plays take up topics often thought of as women's issues: abortion, diagnoses of mental ill-

ness and domestic violence?

The anthology signals that tradition no longer dictates what women can write about. But if this is the case, then why bother with the "by American Women" tag in the title? *Front Lines'* real accomplishment is to fill a void of anthologies of female-authored plays. But, perhaps, more significantly, it also disproves the necessity of the gendered distinction. ■

# Phrase Warriors

Continued from back page

perts, the head of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees—the phrase provides the reassurance of presumed expertise.

The cliché was spawned by the business world, with its invocation of the market index's closing balance. At the end of the day, are you making money or aren't you making money? Economic phrases have seeped into the everyday English lexicon: "In the red" and "in the black" were ranked number two and three on Factiva's most-used media clichés survey, suggesting that "at the end of the day" is part of this same game of ticks and tallies. Similarly, Lois A. Beckwith's 2006 *Dictionary of Corporate Bullshit* included "at the end of the day" as part of the office talk lexicon: "a phrase uttered in conclusion by managers who are supposedly explaining a somewhat nonsensical corporate tenet/idea/policy/decision that probably does not make sense ('At the end of the day, it is what it is')." The business blog "At the End of the Day" even tries to distinguish itself from the crowd with the following subtitle: "Talkin' business. Without business clichés."

Alternative histories credit Colin Powell, who had a liking for the phrase, as the original propagator. Certainly "at the end of the day" has a special place in politics. When Bob Baker's Newsthinking.com broke its story about the man behind the Factiva data, they went to the source. "You can hear politicians say it all the time," [Factiva executive Chris] Pash said by phone from Sydney. "It gets annoying because you know the kiss-off is coming; it's code for: 'I'm about to say something irrelevant.'"

Or it may be that you're about to say something you fear your audience may not acknowledge. During the Valerie Plame affair, Joe Wilson was quoted by CNN trying to say something he couldn't say. "I'm not going to sit here and accuse the president of the United States of ... betraying the national security of the country. But at the end of the day, if you're going to say, get the information out, that basically means declassify the National

Intelligence Estimate ... and that's what Mr. Libby did."

Business or politics, at the end of the day, it's unclear which culture of urgency created this colloquial monster. But a quick listen on the New York subway reveals the phrase tumbling through conversations like a pair of sneakers in a dryer. Most instances are work-related,

the same time, it shows everyone else just how mercenary and hypocritical the bottom line can be.

So whatever happened to "the bottom line"? To all being said and done, to push coming to shove, to the pedal hitting the metal, the shit hitting the fan? My academic friends say, "In the end." I note its slightly wilting quality. "In the end, to-

**In Usenet times like these, where words and thoughts approach the limit-point of infinity, 'at the end of the day' offers the promise of deep and lasting punctuation.**

reminding us how much public conversation has to do with our economic roles and relations. "At the end of the day, my skills are necessary and his are not." "At the end of the day, he's still your boss." "At the end of the day, would you rather be unemployed?"

I first heard this phrase a few years ago. An ex-boyfriend was complaining about his business partner in New England. "Because at the end of the day ... and at the end of the day ... so at the end of the day," he kept saying. I cradled my cell phone in my neck as I walked on beneath the trees in Prospect Park, trying to process the melodrama of money, authority and control. But my mind was elsewhere: marveling at the insistence of this strange phrase in his vocabulary, wondering if he heard how much he was using it

Perhaps uncertainty about whether we are a culture of possibilities or dead ends makes us crave that six-word commonplace. Is our society open and just after all is said and done, or, when push comes to shove, are we a bunch of cheats and opportunists? "At the end of the day, money management isn't a meritocracy but rather an ol' boys network," is how a Finalternatives.com news story on the Madoff scandal put it. And from WorldNetDaily: "Everyone in the adult industry will say they don't want kids to access porn, but at the end of the day, many aren't willing to put their money where their mouth is." The phrase helps those who want to make money calculate the bottom line. At

temism has been completely discredited as a religious structure and system of identification." "In the end" invokes already established authority; it has no real power to call bullshit—it is just a story with a finis. In Usenet times like these, given to a barrage of verbiage, the end of days may be an appealing metaphor for the assertion of earned conclusiveness. Where words and thoughts approach the limit-point of infinity, "at the end of the day" offers the promise of deep and lasting punctuation.

And this may be the undiagnosed urge behind the apocalyptic: In an age of mounting economic and moral crises, we need something to cut through our most deeply felt contradictions. Through chat rooms and locker rooms, accusations and counter-accusations that fly left and right. But when a voice from the blogosphere draws the line: "He may be your homeboy and all, but dude—at the end of the day, Chris Brown and Chris Brown alone is responsible for the injuries sustained by Rihanna," all our equivocating must stop. In other words: enough already.

For at the end of the day, perhaps we all just want the end of the day: the final word we get when we turn of the lights and close the door, "and that's all there is, there isn't anymore." Trapped inside the situation room with its shrill and repeated stories blaring overhead, we demand a little goodnight with our apocalypse. So that, at the end of the day, we'll know that someone is listening to us. ■



AT THE END OF THE DAY,  
IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD

He had. Apparently the cliché is inescapable. The moment of final reckoning in any debate or conversation, “at the end of the day” is a phrase I associate with the fast-talking wannabe business elite: people for whom survival means word-power, not catching fish with your bare hands. But as the British TV

To be fair, many “end of the day” media citations are direct quotes of interviewees. Every time a source is cited—Rod Blagojevich’s spokesman, conservative health care policy ex-

[illegible]